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The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

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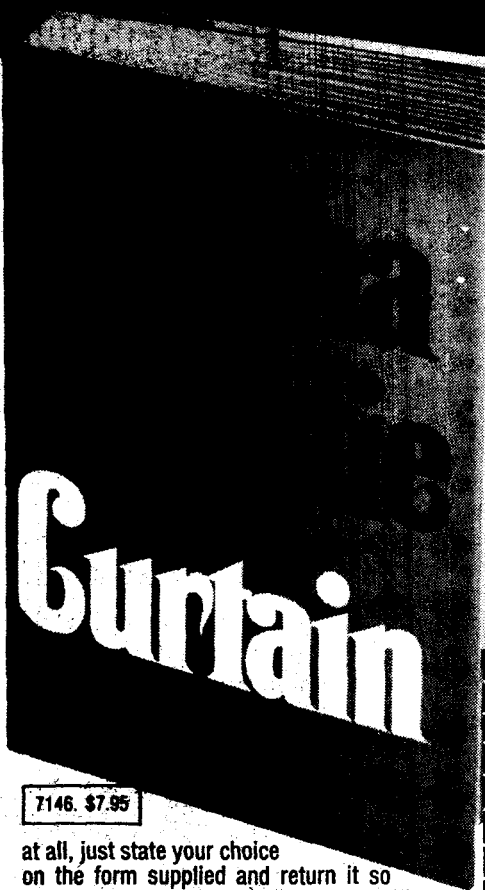

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THE BLOOD BARGAIN

by ERIC AMBLER

Ex-President Fuentes enjoys a peculiar distinction. More people would like to kill him now that he is in retirement than wanted to kill him when he was in power.

He is a puzzled and indignant man.

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What he fails to understand is that, while men like General Perez may in time forgive you for robbing them, they will never forgive you for making them look foolish.

The *coup d'etat* which overthrew Fuentes' Social Action Party government was well organized and relatively bloodless.

The leaders of the coup were mostly army officers, but they had understandings with fellow dissidents in the air force and navy as well as the discreet blessing of the Church. A price for the collaboration of the Chief of Police had been agreed upon well in advance, and the lists of certain left-wing deputies, militant trade union officials, pro-government newspaper editors, trained subversives, and other undesirables whose prompt arrest would be advisable, had been compiled with the Chief's help.

Similar arrangements had been made in the larger provincial towns. Although the conspirators were by no means all of the same political complexion, they had for once found themselves able to sink their differences in the pursuit of a common goal. Whatever might come afterward, they were all agreed upon one thing; if the country were to be saved from corruption, Communist subversion, anarchy, bankruptcy, civil war, and, ultimately, foreign military intervention, President Fuentes had to go.

One evening in September he went.

The tactics employed by the "Liberation Front" conspirators followed the pattern which has become more or less traditional when a coup is backed by organized military forces and opposed, if it is opposed at all, only by civilian mobs and confused, lightly armed garrison units.

As darkness fell, the tanks of two armored brigades together with trucks containing a parachute regiment, signals units, and a company of combat engineers rolled into the capital. Within little more than an hour they had secured their major objectives. Meanwhile, the air force had taken over the international airport, grounded all planes, and established a headquarters in the Customs and Immigration Building.

An infantry division now began to move into the city and take up positions which would enable it to deal with the civil disturbances which were expected to develop as news of the coup, and of the mass arrests which were accompanying it, reached the densely populated slum areas with their high concentrations of Fuentes supporters.

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A little after 8:30 a squadron of tanks and a special task force of paratroopers reached the Presidential Palace. The Palace guard resisted for a quarter of an hour and suffered casualties of eight wounded. The order to surrender was given personally to the guard commander by President Fuentes "in order to avoid further bloodshed."

When this was reported to General Perez, the leader of the coup, he drove to the Palace. He was accompanied by five senior members of the Liberation Front council, including the Chief of Police, and no less than three representatives of the foreign press. The latter had been flushed out of the Jockey Club bar by an aide earlier in the evening and hastily briefed on the aims and ideals of the Liberation Front. General Perez wished to lose no time in establishing himself abroad as a magnanimous, reasonable, and responsible man, and his regime as worthy of prompt diplomatic recognition.

The newsmen's accounts of the interview between President Fuentes and General Perez, and of the now-notorious "blood bargain" which emerged from it, were all in substantial agreement. At the time the bargain seemed to them just another of those civilized, oddly chivalrous agreements to live and let live which, by testifying to the continued presence of compassion and good sense, even at moments of turmoil and destruction, have so often lightened the long dark history of Latin American revolution.

The reporters, all experienced men, can scarcely be blamed for misunderstanding it. They knew, as everyone else knew, that President Fuentes was a devious and deeply dishonest man. The only mistake they made was in assuming that the other parties to the bargain had made due allowance for that deviousness and dishonesty and knew exactly what they were doing. What the reporters had not realized was that these normally wary and hard-headed officers had become so intoxicated by the speed and extent of their initial success that by the time they reached the Presidential Palace they were no longer capable of thinking clearly.

President Fuentes received General Perez and the other Liberation Front leaders in the ornate Cabinet Room of the Palace to which he had been taken by the paratroopers who had arrested him. With him were the other male occupants of the Presidential air-raid shelter at the time of his arrest. These included the Palace guard commander, the President's valet, the Palace major-domo, two footmen, and the man who looked after the Palace

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plumbing system, in addition to the Minister of Public Welfare, the Minister of Agrarian Education, the Minister of Justice and the elderly Controller of the Presidential Secretariat.

The Minister of Public Welfare had brought a bottle of brandy with him from the shelter and smiled glassily throughout the subsequent confrontation. Agrarian Education and Justice maintained expressions of bewilderment and indignation, but confined their oral protests to circumspect murmurs. The thin-lipped young captain in charge of the paratroopers handled his machine pistol as if he would have been glad of an excuse to use it.

Only the President seemed at ease. There was even a touch of impatience in the shrug with which he rose to face General Perez and his party as they strode in from the anteroom; it was as if he had been interrupted by some importunate visitor during a game of bridge.

His calm was only partly assumed. He knew all about General Perez's sensitivity to foreign opinion, and he had immediately recognized the newsmen in the rear of the procession. They would not have been brought there if any immediate violence to his person had been contemplated.

The impatience he displayed was certainly genuine; it was impatience with himself. He had known for weeks that a coup was in preparation, and had taken the precaution a month earlier of sending his wife and children and his mistress out of the country. They were all now in Washington, and he had planned, using as a pretext his announced wish to address personally a meeting of the Organization of American States, to join them there the following week.

His private spies had reported that the coup would undoubtedly be timed to take advantage of his absence abroad. Since the coup by means of which he himself had come to power five years earlier had been timed in that way, he had been disposed to believe the report.

Now he knew better. Whether or not his spies had deliberately deceived him did not matter at the moment. A mistake had been made which was, he knew, likely to cost him more than temporary inconvenience. Unless he could repair it immediately, by getting out of the country within the next few hours, that mistake would certainly cost him his liberty, and most probably his life.

He had risked death before, was familiar with the physical and mental sensations that accompanied the experience, and with a

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small effort was able to ignore them. As General Perez came up to him, the President displayed no emotion of any kind. He merely nodded politely and waited for the General to speak.

For a moment the General seemed tongue-tied. He was sweating, too. As this was the first time he had overthrown a government he was undoubtedly suffering from stage fright. He took refuge finally in military punctilio. With a click of the heels he came to attention and fixed his eyes on the President's left ear.

"We are here—" he began harshly, then cleared his throat and corrected himself. "I and my fellow members of the Council of the Liberation Front are here to inform you that a state of national emergency now exists."

The President nodded politely. "I am glad to have that information, General. Since telephone communication has been cut off I have naturally been curious as to what was happening. These gentlemen"—he motioned to the paratroopers—"seemed unwilling to enlighten me."

The General ignored this and went on as if he were reading a proclamation. In fact, he was quoting from the press release which had already been handed to the newsmen. "Directed by the Council and under its orders," he said, "the armed forces have assumed control of all functions of civil government in the state, and, as provided in the Constitution, demand your resignation."

The President looked astounded. "You have the affrontery to claim constitutional justification for this mutiny?"

For the first time since he had entered the room the General relaxed slightly. "We have a precedent, sir. Nobody should know that better than you. You yourself set it when you legalized your own seizure of power from your predecessor. Need I remind you of the wording of the amendment? 'If for any reason, including the inability to fulfill the duties of his office by reason of ill health, mental or physical, or absence, an elected President is unable to exercise the authority vested in him under the Constitution, a committee representative of the nation and those responsible to it for the maintenance of law and order may request his resignation and be entitled . . .' "

For several seconds the President had been waving his hands for silence. Now he broke in angrily. "Yes, yes, I know all about that. But my predecessor was absent. I am not. Neither am I ill, physically or mentally. There are no legal grounds on which you are entitled to ask for my resignation."

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"No legal grounds, sir?" General Perez could smile now. He pointed to the paratroopers. "Are you able to exercise the authority of a president? *Are* you? If you think so, try."

The President pretended to think over the challenge. The interview was so far going more or less as he had expected, but the next moves would be the critical ones for him. He walked over to a window and back in order to give himself time to collect himself.

Everyone there was watching him. The tension in the room was mounting. He could feel it. It was odd, he thought. Here he was, a prisoner, wholly at their mercy; and yet they were waiting for him to come to a decision, to make a choice where no choice existed. It was absurd. All they wanted from him was relief from a small and quite irrational sense of guilt. They had the Church's blessing; now the poor fools yearned for the blessing of the law, too. Very well. They should have it. But it would be expensive.

He turned and faced General Perez again.

"A resignation exacted from me under duress would have no force in law," he said.

The General glanced at the Chief of Police. "You are a lawyer, Raymundo. Who represents the law here?"

"The Council of the Liberation Front, General."

Perez looked at the President again. "You see, sir, there are no technical difficulties. We even have the necessary document already prepared."

His aide held up a black-leather portfolio.

The President hesitated, looking from one face to another as if hoping against hope that he might find a friendly one. Finally he shrugged. "I will read the document," he said coldly and walked toward the cabinet table. As he did so he seemed to become aware again of his fellow prisoners in the room. He stopped suddenly.

"Must my humiliation be witnessed by my colleagues and my servants as well as the foreign press?" he demanded bitterly.

General Perez motioned to the paratrooper captain. "Take those men into another room. Leave guards outside the doors of this one."

The President waited until the group from the air-raid shelter had been herded out, then sat down at the table. The General's aide opened the portfolio, took out a legal document laced with green ribbon, and placed it in front of the President.

He made a show of studying the document very carefully. In

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fact, he was indifferent to its contents. His intention was simply to let the tension mount a little higher and to allow the other men there to feel that they were on the point of getting what they wanted.

For three minutes there was dead silence in the room. It was broken only by the sound of distant machine-gun fire. It seemed to be coming from the south side of the city. The President heard a slight stir from the group of men behind him and one of them cleared his throat nervously. There was another burst of firing. The President took no notice of it. He read the document through a third time, then put it down and sat back in his chair.

The aide offered him a pen with which to sign. The President ignored it and turned his head so that he could see General Perez.

"You spoke of a resignation, General," he said. "You did not mention that it was to be a confession also."

"Hardly a confession, sir," the General replied drily. "We would not expect you voluntarily to incriminate yourself. The admission is only of incompetence. That is not yet a criminal offense in a head of state."

The President smiled faintly. "And if I were to sign this paper, what kind of personal treatment might I expect to receive afterwards? A prison cell perhaps, with a carefully staged treason trial to follow? Or merely a bullet in the head and an unmarked grave?"

The General reddened. "We are here to correct abuses of power, sir, not to imitate them. When you have signed you will be conducted to your former home in Alazan province. You will be expected to remain there for the present and the governor of the province will be instructed to see that you do so. Apart from that restriction you will be free to do as you please. Your family will naturally be permitted to join you."

"You mention the house in Alazan province. What about my other personal property?"

"You will be permitted to retain everything you owned when you took office."

"I see." The President stood up and moved away from the table. "I will think about it. I will let you have my decision tomorrow," he added casually.

The silence that followed this announcement did not last long, but one of the newsmen reported later that it was one of the loudest he had ever heard. Another remembered that during it he

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suddenly became conscious of the presence and smell of a large bowl of tropical flowers on a side table by the anteroom door.

The President had walked toward the windows again. General Perez took two steps toward him, then stopped.

"You must decide at once! You must sign now!" he snapped.

The President turned on him. "Why? Why now?"

It was the Chief of Police who answered him. "Son of a whore, because we tell you to!" he shouted.

Suddenly they were all shouting at him. One officer was so enraged that he drew his pistol. The General had difficulty in restoring order.

The President took no notice of them. He kept his eyes on General Perez, but it was really the newsmen he was addressing now. As the din subsided he raised his voice.

"I asked a question, General. Why now? Why the haste? It is a reasonable question. If, as you say, you already control the country, what have you to fear from me? Or is it, perhaps, that your control is not in fact as complete and effective as you would have us believe?"

The General had to quell another angry outburst from his colleagues before he could answer, but he preserved his own temper admirably. His reply was calm and deliberate.

"I will tell you exactly what we control so that you may judge for yourself," he said. "To begin with, all provincial army garrisons, air-force establishments, and police posts have declared for the Liberation Front, as have five out of eight of the provincial governors. The three objectors—I am sure you will have guessed who they are—have been rendered harmless and replaced by military governors. None of this can come as a great surprise to you, I imagine. You never had much support outside the capital and the mining areas."

The President nodded. "Stupidity can sometimes be charted geographically," he remarked.

"Now, as to the capital. We control the airfields, both military and civil, the naval base, all communications including telephone, radio, and television broadcast facilities, the power stations, all fuel-oil storage facilities, all main traffic arteries, all government offices and city police posts together with the offices and printing presses of *El Correo* and *La Gaceta*."

The General glanced at his watch. "In connection with the broadcast facilities I may mention that while the television sta-

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tion is temporarily off the air, the radio station will shortly begin broadcasting an announcement of the establishment of the new Liberation Front regime, which I recorded two days ago. As I told you before, everything is now under our control."

The President smiled and glanced significantly at the newsmen. "Are the *sumideri* under control, General?"

Sumideri, meaning sinks or drains, was the popular slang term used to describe the slum areas on the south side of the capital.

The General hesitated only an instant. "The southern area is effectively contained," he replied stiffly. "The first infantry division reinforced by the third tank brigade has that responsibility."

"I see." The President looked again at the newsmen. "So the civil war may be expected to begin at any moment."

With a quick motion of his hands the General silenced the chorus of objections from his colleagues. "We are fully prepared to deal firmly with any mob violence which may occur," he said. "Of that you may be sure."

"Yes," said the President bitterly, "perhaps civil war is not the phrase to use for the planned massacre of unarmed civilians." He swung around suddenly to face the newsmen and his voice hardened. "You have been witnesses to this farce, gentlemen. I ask you to remember it well and let the civilized world know of it. These men come to ask for my resignation as head of state. That is all they want! Why? Because outside in the streets of the city their tanks and guns are waiting to begin the slaughter of the thousands of men and women who will proclaim their loyalty to me. And the way to bring them out for the slaughter is to fling my resignation like so much filth in their faces!"

General Perez could stand it no longer. "That is a lie!" he shouted.

The President turned on him savagely. "Do you think they will *not* come out? Why else are they 'contained,' as you call it? Why else? Because they are my people and because they will listen only to me."

A glow of triumph suffused General Perez's angry face. "Then their blood will be on *your* hands!" he roared. He stabbed a forefinger at the newsmen. "You heard what he said, gentlemen. *They do what he tells them!* It is his responsibility, then, not ours if they oppose us. *He* will be the murderer of women and children! Let him deny it."

This time the President made no reply. He just stood there look-

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ing about him in bewilderment, like a boxer who has staggered to his feet after a count of ten and can't quite realize that the fight is over. At last he walked slowly back to the cabinet table, sat down heavily, and buried his head in his hands.

Nobody else moved. When the President raised his head and looked at them again, his eyes were haggard. He spoke very quietly.

"You are right," he said; "they are my people and they will do as I tell them. It is my responsibility. I accept it. There must be no senseless bloodshed. I think it is my duty to tell them not to protest."

For a moment they all stared at him incredulously. The Chief of Police started to say something, then stopped as he caught General Perez's eye. If the man were serious this was too good an opportunity to miss.

General Perez went over and addressed the President. "I cannot believe that even you would speak lightly on such a matter, but I must ask if you seriously mean what you say."

The President nodded absently. "I will need about an hour to draft my statement. There is a direct line to the radio station here in the Palace and the necessary equipment. The station can record me on tape." He managed a rueful smile. "In the circumstances I imagine that you would prefer a recording to a live broadcast."

"Yes." But the General was still reluctant to believe in his triumph. "How can you be sure that they will obey you?" he asked.

The President thought before he answered. "There will be some, of course, who will be too distressed, too angry perhaps, to do as I ask," he said. "But if the officers commanding troops are ordered to use restraint, casualties can be kept to a minimum." He glanced at the Chief of Police. "There should be moderation, too, in respect of arrests. But the majority will listen to me, I think." He paused. "The important thing is that they must believe that I am speaking as a free man, and not out of fear because there is a pistol at my head."

"I myself can give them that assurance," said the General. The fact that he could make such an ingenuous suggestion is an indication of his mental confusion at that point.

The President raised his eyebrows. "With all respect, General, I don't think we could expect them at this time to believe you of all

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people. I also think that the news that I am to be kept under what amounts to house arrest in Alazan province will not help to convince them either."

"Then what do you propose? You can scarcely remain here in the capital."

"Naturally not." The President sat back in his chair. He had assumed a statesmanlike air now. "It is quite clear," he said, "that we must achieve an orderly and responsible transfer of power. I shall, of course, resign in order to make way for the Liberation Front. However, in your place, I must say that I would regard my continued presence anywhere in this country as undesirable. These people to whom I am to appeal tonight will only respond with restraint because of their loyalty to me. That loyalty will continue as long as they are able to give expression to it. You would do better really to get rid of me. As soon as I have spoken to my people you should get me out of the country as quickly as you can."

"Exile?" It was the Chief of Police who spoke now. "But if we exile you that looks no better than house arrest in Alazan. Worse, possibly."

"Exactly." The President nodded approvingly. "The solution I suggest is that I am permitted to announce to my people that I will continue to serve them, the nation, and the Liberation Front, but in a different capacity and abroad. Our embassy in Nicaragua is without an ambassador at present. That would be a suitable appointment. I suggest that after I have recorded my broadcast I leave the country immediately in order to take up my post."

The council discussion that ensued lacked the vehemence of the earlier exchanges. The strain of the past twenty-four hours was beginning to tell on General Perez and his colleagues; they were getting tired; and the sounds of firing from the south side were becoming more insistent. Time was running out. It was one of the newsmen who drew their attention to the fact.

"General," he said to Perez, "has it occurred to you that if the President doesn't talk to those people of his pretty soon, they're all going to be out on the streets anyway?"

The President recognized the urgency, too, but refused to be hurried. As he pointed out, there were matters of protocol to be dealt with before he could make his appeal to the people. For one thing, his resignation would have to be redrafted. Since, he argued, he was now to be appointed his country's ambassador to

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Nicaragua, references in the present draft to his incompetence would obviously have to be deleted. And there were other clauses which might be interpreted as reflections on his personal integrity.

In the end the President wrote his own act of resignation. It was a simple document but composed with great care. His radio speech, on the other hand, he scribbled out on a cabinet desk pad while technicians, hastily summoned by jeep from the central radio building, were setting up a recording circuit in the anteroom.

Meanwhile, telephone communication had been restored to the Palace, and the Controller of the Presidential Secretariat had been released from arrest and put to work in his office.

His first task had been to contact the ambassador from Nicaragua, give him a discreetly censored account of the current situation, and request him to ascertain immediately, in accordance with Article 8 of the Pan-American Convention, if his government would be prepared to accept ex-President Fuentes as *persona grata* in the capacity of ambassador to their country. The Nicaraguan ambassador had undertaken to telephone personally to the Minister of Foreign Relations in Managua and report back. His unofficial opinion was that there would be no opposition to the proposed appointment.

With the help of the air-force council member present, the Controller next spoke to the officer in charge at the International Airport. He learned that of the two civil airliners grounded earlier that evening, one had been southbound to Caracas, the other, a Colombian Avianca jet, had been northbound to Mexico City. Fortunately, a Vice-Consul from the Colombian Consulate-General was already at the airport, having been summoned there by the Avianca captain to protest the grounding.

The Controller spoke with the Vice-Consul who said that Avianca would be willing to carry ex-President Fuentes as a passenger to Mexico City if the Mexican government would permit him to land. A call to the Mexican Embassy explaining that ex-President Fuentes would be in transit through Mexican territory on his way to his post as an accredited diplomatic representative to the Republic of Nicaragua secured the necessary permission.

The President already had a diplomatic passport which needed only minor amendments to fit it for its new role. All that was needed now to facilitate his departure was confirmation from the

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Nicaraguan ambassador that he would be accorded diplomatic status in Managua. Within an hour the Nicaraguan government, acting promptly in the belief that they were helping both parties to the arrangement, had replied favorably.

The escape route was open.

President Fuentes made two tape recordings of the appeal to his supporters, one for the radio, the second for use by a loudspeaker van in the streets of the *sumideri.* Then he signed his resignation and was driven to the airport. General Perez provided an escort of armored cars.

The plane, with ex-President Fuentes on board, took off a little after midnight. Five hours later it landed in Mexico City.

News of the Liberation Front coup and of the President's voluntary resignation and ambassadorial appointment had been carried by all the international wire services, and there were reporters waiting for him. There was also, despite the early hour, a protocol official from the Department of External Relations to meet him. Fuentes made a brief statement to the reporters, confirming the fact of his resignation. On the subject of his appointment as ambassador to Nicaragua he was vague. He then drove to a hotel in the city. On the way there he asked the protocol official if it would be convenient for him to call upon the Minister of External Affairs later that day.

The official was mildly surprised. As Ambassador Fuentes was merely passing through Mexico, a brief note of thanks to the Minister would normally be the only courtesy expected of him. On the other hand, the circumstances of Fuentes' sudden translation from President to ambassador were unusual and it was possible that the Minister might be glad of the opportunity of hearing what Fuentes himself had to say on the subject. He promised that he would consult the Minister's personal assistant at the earliest possible moment.

The Minister received Ambassador Fuentes at five o'clock that afternoon.

The two men had met before, at conferences of the Organization of American States and on the occasion of a state visit to Mexico paid by Fuentes soon after he became President. It was a tribute to the Minister's natural courtesy as well as his self-discipline that Fuentes believed that the Minister liked him. In fact the Minister viewed him with dislike and disapproval and had not been in the least surprised or distressed by the news of the Liber-

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ation Front coup. However, he had been amused by Fuentes' ability to emerge from the situation not only alive and free but also invested with diplomatic immunity; and it modified his distaste for the man. Fuentes was, one had to admit, an engaging scoundrel.

After the preliminary politenesses had been disposed of, the Minister inquired courteously whether he could be of any service to the ambassador during his stay in Mexico.

Fuentes inclined his head: "That is most kind of you, Mr. Minister," he said graciously. "Yes, there is one thing."

"You only have to ask."

"Thank you." Ambassador Fuentes straightened up a little in his chair. "I wish," he said, "to make formal application to be considered here as a refugee, and formally to request political asylum in the United States of Mexico."

The Minister stared for a moment, then smiled.

"Surely you must be joking, Mr. Ambassador."

"Not in the least."

The Minister was puzzled, and because he was puzzled he put into words the first obvious objection that came into his head.

"But in the United States of Mexico, even though you are not accredited to the federal government, you already, by virtue of the Pan-American Convention, enjoy diplomatic status and privileges here," he said.

It was a statement he was later to regret.

Ambassador Fuentes never took up his post in Nicaragua.

One of the first official acts of General Perez's Council of the Liberation Front was to set up a committee, headed by the Professor of Political Economy at Bolivar University, to report on the financial state of the Republic.

It took the committee only a few days to discover that during the past three years ex-President Fuentes had authorized printings of 500-peseta banknotes to a total value of $100,000,000 and that 20 of those millions could not be accounted for.

The governor of the National Bank was immediately arrested. He was an old man who had spent most of his life in the National Archives gathering material for a scholarly study of colonial Spanish land grants. He had been appointed to the bank by Fuentes. He knew nothing about banking. He had merely carried out the orders of the Minister of Finance.

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Fuentes had been his own Minister of Finance.

Interviewed on the subject by the press in Mexico City, ex-President Fuentes stated that the committee's revelations had shocked, horrified, and amazed him. He also said that he had no idea where the missing $20,000,000 might be. Regrettably, he was unable quite to refrain from smiling as he said it.

Ex-President Fuentes' retirement has not been peaceful.

During the five years he held office as President there was only one serious attempt on his life. Since he resigned the Presidency, ceased to concern himself with politics and went to live abroad, no less than three such attempts have been made. There will doubtless be others. Meanwhile, he has had to fight off two extradition proceedings and a number of civil actions directed against his European bank accounts.

He is wealthy, of course, and can afford to pay for all the protection, both physical and legal, that he needs; but he is by no means resigned to the situation. As he is fond of pointing out, other men in his position have accumulated even larger fortunes. Moreover, his regime was never unacceptably oppressive. He was no Trujillo, no Batista, no Porfirio Diaz. Why then should he be hounded and harassed as if he were?

Ex-President Fuentes remains a puzzled and indignant man.

THE LAST ENEMY, by Berton Roueché. Harper & Row, $6.95

The author of *Feral*—the thriller about nature gone wild—has written a chilling tale of murder by a human. Leland Sessions, rich, handsome, was accused of murdering his mother's maid with a pair of shears. No matter how he screamed his innocence he seemed to be trapped deeper and deeper in his nightmare. In his crisp, mind-boggling style, Mr. Roueché has written another terrifying novel of how the fates, with just a little twist here and there, can not only entangle a man but finish him off completely.

IN THE LAMB WHITE DAYS. A Novel of Suspense by F. H. Hall. Bobbs-Merrill, $6.95

Through a break in the fog, Crane sees a sailboat coming at him on a collision course. Hard at the helm he averts a crash, then is startled at seeing a child's body being thrown overboard into the murky waters of Lake Michigan. From the moment Cricket Crane rescues Young Tom he finds himself deeply involved with the boy's family as he uncovers events buried under a mountain of shame and guilt . . . events that create a pattern of destruction and death.

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a NEW Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

It is gratifying to learn that from time to time one of your Editor's story-introductions starts the creative juices flowing in another writer's veins, starts the wheels of invention turning in another writer's mind. In our editorial comment prefacing Phyllis Bentley's "Miss Phipps Meets a Dog," in our October 1974 issue, we said: "One of the curses of fictional detectives, both male and female, is that they can't go anywhere, see anything, do anything—even the most innocent everyday things—without becoming involved with crime, from misdemeanor to murder. You'd swear a fictional detective shouldn't even brush his or her teeth in the morning! As for taking a walk—it's fraught with peril!"

Well, as Edward D. Hoch wrote us, your Editor's playful remarks "directly inspired" the newest Captain Leopold story. All the Captain did was go to a New York convention of Chiefs of Police to give a speech—but there was the puzzling matter of the clock in the closet . . .

NO CRIME FOR CAPTAIN LEOPOLD

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Ever since brown-eyed Connie Trent joined the department, she and Fletcher had engaged in some good-natured kidding of Captain Leopold whenever the occasion warranted. He enjoyed the kidding, as he enjoyed Connie's presence, and the afternoon coffee breaks on slow days were relaxing for all three of them.

Usually it would start with Fletcher getting the coffee from the cranky old machine in the hallway and bringing three cups into Leopold's office. If Connie wasn't busy she joined them. Officially it was a time for discussion of pending cases, but on those rare afternoons when violent crime was at a minimum the conversation generally turned to light-hearted banter.

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"I'm off to the convention tomorrow," Leopold was telling them both this day. "You'll be in charge, Fletcher."

"What convention?" Connie asked.

"International Conference of Chiefs of Police," Fletcher replied. "The Captain's one of the featured speakers."

Leopold nodded. "At the New York Hilton. I'll drive down tomorrow morning and come back the next day."

Connie put down her coffee cup and sat there grinning. "Well, we can expect to read about a murder at the Hilton!"

Fletcher joined in, smiling. "That's right. You never go anywhere, Captain, that you don't bump into a murder—a Christmas party, class reunion, vacation, even a family funeral!"

"Come on, now!" Leopold pleaded. "You make me sound like one of those detectives on TV."

"But it's true," Connie insisted. "I'll make you a bet right now that somewhere at that convention tomorrow you run smack into a murder or other violent crime. The speaker ahead of you will be poisoned, or some visiting police chief will be thrown from a window. Something will happen!"

Leopold chuckled and took out his wallet. "Come on now, it's not quite that bad. Here's a dollar says I don't get involved with any crime or violence on this trip."

"I'll hold the money," Fletcher volunteered, taking their dollar bills.

"Have a good trip," Connie said. "But that's one bet I'm going to win."

"Get out of here, you two," Leopold grumbled. "Let me finish working on my speech."

The autumn drive to New York was a pleasant one for Leopold. There were times when he liked just being alone, away from the constant turmoil of the office. Perhaps he was getting too old for violent crimes, and the additional violence that so often went with their solution. Something like this—a speech to other law-enforcement officers—could still be enjoyed, because it was crime in the abstract.

At the hotel someone stuck an adhesive-backed name tag on his jacket and handed him a folder of press releases. He wandered through the crowded lobby until he spotted a familiar face.

"Cartwright! How've you been?" he greeted a tall handsome man in cowboy boots.

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"My God, it's Leopold! I heard you were speakin' tonight." Eagle Cartwright was the police chief of Blue Hills, Ohio—a Cleveland suburb near Shaker Heights. Leopold had worked with him 20 years ago on the New York City police force, before they both went their separate ways.

"How's crime in Blue Hills these days?"

Cartwright shrugged. "Caught some kids smokin' pot and stealin' cars. Biggest excitement we've had all year."

"And the family?"

"Sarah's fine. The boy's away at college, so we're alone now."

He was a few years younger than Leopold, and he still had the appearance of a vigorous, athletic man. Perhaps it was only laziness that took him away from big-city law enforcement and dropped him into an affluent Ohio suburb.

Leopold had met his wife at a convention some years back. Now, as Cartwright opened his wallet to show a color snapshot of the family posed beside a camping trailer, he said honestly, "Sarah's still a beautiful woman. And your boy has really grown up."

"Time passes," Cartwright agreed. "Sarah came with me this year. You'll see her at dinner tonight."

"I'm looking forward to it."

The program chairman appeared to grip Leopold's hand and whisk him away. "Let's have a drink later," he suggested to Cartwright. "We've got a lot of years to catch up on."

The tall man nodded and then they were separated by a milling throng of new arrivals.

The speech was well received, and Leopold found himself the center of attention when the dinner session ended. Men he'd barely known over the years insisted on buying him a drink, and his mind was growing a bit fuzzy by the time he encountered Eagle Cartwright and his wife.

Sarah was as charming and gracious as he remembered her, and he was tempted to accept their invitation for a drink, but at that moment he felt like nothing more than a cup of coffee. "I'm getting too old for these conventions, Sarah. I'd better pass up another drink."

"I hope we see you tomorrow before we leave," she said.

"Maybe for breakfast," he suggested.

As they separated, he caught a troubled look on Cartwright's

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face. Something was bothering the man, but Leopold had no idea what.

After a shower in his room Leopold felt better. It was not yet eleven o'clock, and he decided to go back downstairs for his coffee. He took the elevator directly to the lower-level coffee shop, avoiding the partying delegates in the lobby. Seated at a table in the nearly deserted place, he was not especially surprised a few minutes later when Eagle Cartwright entered to join him.

"You mentioned wanting coffee," Cartwright explained. "I took a chance you might be here."

"Glad you did. Is Sarah coming down, too?"

Cartwright shook his head. "She's gone to bed." He sat opposite Leopold and ordered coffee. After a moment's silence he said, "Actually, I wanted to talk to you. I've got a problem."

"If it's anything I can help you with, Eagle, I'll be glad to. You did me a few favors back in the 29th Precinct."

"Hell, I don't really know if you can help me or not. To tell the truth, I don't know that it's so much a problem as it is a puzzle. And we lawmen these days aren't much on puzzles. I drive around Blue Hills in my Chief's car and occasionally I help question a car thief or a kid with a few joints—but if I ever got hit with a real murder mystery like on TV I don't know what in hell I'd do!"

"You haven't had one, have you?"

"No, no." Cartwright gave a forced laugh. "This is something personal. I guess you'd hardly call it a crime at all. But it's botherin' me, and maybe if I talk about it I can get set straight. I may be too close to the thing to judge it rightly."

Leopold sipped his coffee. "Tell me about it."

"Well, first I gotta tell you about Ron Springer. He's a bit younger than me—about thirty-five, I'd guess—and he and his wife Gert have been our closest friends for the past few years. Ron's a detail man for a pharmaceutical manufacturer, callin' on doctors in the Cleveland area. He and Gert have a small one-bedroom apartment near us in Blue Hills. They never had children and they don't really need a bigger place."

"This Springer is in some sort of trouble?"

Cartwright hesitated. "I don't rightly know. About a year ago somebody broke into our house. I had a suspicion it was a wild bunch of kids my son was hanging around with at the time. Not much was stolen—a piggy bank with some half dollars in it, a camera, a tape recorder. Kids or drug addicts, I figured."

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"That's likely," Leopold agreed.

"Well, just last week we were over to the Springers for dinner. It's always a treat for Sarah when we go out because I have to work so many nights. You know how it is in our line of work." Leopold nodded. "It had been raining earlier—one of those annoying October showers that cover your car with wet leaves—and we'd both worn raincoats. Ron hung them in the front closet.

"As I've said, the apartment is small—living room, bedroom, kitchen, and bath—and we ate in the living room, buffet style. Sarah and I were together on the sofa, I remember. Anyway, it was when we were leaving that I found it. Ron, always the gentleman, got out Sarah's raincoat and was helping her on with it. I went into the closet after my own, and that's when I heard it."

"Heard what?"

"The ticking. Naturally I was curious, so I moved a hatbox on the closet shelf and there it was—an alarm clock showing the correct time. In the closet!"

"Strange."

"Damn right it's strange! I was all set to make a joke about it when all of a sudden I recognized the clock. It was an old one we'd used some years back until I dropped it and cracked the glass. Last time I'd seen it was in our basement."

"What did you do?"

"Well, I couldn't say anything. Ronnie and Gert are our best friends. But I told Sarah about it on the way home and the first thing we did was to search our basement for that old clock. It wasn't there."

"A coincidence," Leopold suggested. "Alarm clocks look pretty much alike."

Cartwright shook his head. "It was the same clock. I remember that crack in the glass because it had an odd angle to it."

"Springer has certainly been at your house in the past. Perhaps he saw it in your basement and simply picked it up."

"Impossible. Sarah's always after me to clean the place out. It's been such a mess this past year we haven't allowed anyone down there."

"Your son might have—"

"He was away at college all year and traveling in Europe this past summer. The only two weeks he was home, we went off on our camping trip."

"Well then?"

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"I'm left with only one possibility—that Ron Springer, our best friend, broke into our house last year and stole those things, including the alarm clock."

"Why would he steal a clock? Especially one with a broken face?"

"I was hoping you could tell me, Leopold. That's the puzzle."

"And if he did steal it, why did he have it hidden away in his front closet, still running and keeping perfect time?"

"Yeah. Why?"

Leopold signaled the waitress for more coffee.

He had Eagle Cartwright go over the whole story again, from beginning to end, but nothing was added to the spare simple facts. Leopold thought about it, saying little. Finally he concluded, "He may be some sort of kleptomaniac, I suppose. Either that or you're mistaken about it being the same clock."

Eagle Cartwright looked glum. He'd probably expected a slick and satisfying solution from Leopold and there was none. "I guess I've been worrying needlessly. I shouldn't have bothered you with my troubles."

"No bother at all. I only wish I could help."

It was now after midnight. Leopold rose to leave, but Cartwright said, "I'll stay a bit."

"Perhaps I'll see you in the morning."

Leopold strode reluctantly toward the elevators. He knew there would still be parties in some of the rooms, but he had no desire to join them. His mind was on Eagle Cartwright and the puzzle of the clock in the closet. The solution to the puzzle was obviously very important to Eagle, for some reason Leopold couldn't quite grasp.

He awakened with a start, and it took him a moment to remember where he was. New York, the convention, Eagle Cartwright, the alarm clock.

The alarm clock in the closet.

And all at once he knew, just like that.

He sat up in bed and thought about it.

Most of all, he thought about what to do with the solution to the puzzle. He was sorry he'd come to New York, sorry he'd listened to his friend's story. But he had listened, and that gave him certain responsibilities he couldn't shrug off.

He knew there was a nine o'clock session scheduled in the ball-

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room. He waited till ten after nine and then rang Cartwright's room. Sarah answered the phone.

"Good morning, this is Leopold. I was wondering about having breakfast together."

"Oh!" Her voice sounded pleasant but cautious. "Well, Eagle went down to the session. Don't you have to go?"

"I'm only a guest speaker, not a delegate. Perhaps just the two of us?"

"Well . . . I'm not dressed yet."

"I really would like to speak with you, Sarah."

She hesitated only another moment. "Very well. The coffee shop? Twenty minutes?"

"Fine."

He was sitting at a table when she arrived. He stood up and held her chair. "I'm glad you could join me. We hardly had time to speak yesterday."

"These conventions are always that way," she replied with a smile. "You never get to see the people you really care about." She ordered juice, toast and coffee, and lit a cigarette.

"Eagle joined me last night for coffee."

She nodded. "He told me he did."

"He wanted some help, but I couldn't give him any last night."

"Help?"

"About that clock in your friend's closet."

"Oh, that! Honestly, it's been an obsession with him this past week."

"I finally figured it out, Sarah. It came to me this morning just as I was waking up."

"You figured. . . ?"

"I thought I should tell you rather than Eagle."

She smiled slightly. "Tell me what?"

"I'd better start at the beginning. Of course the key to everything is that clock in the closet. Last night I asked myself why it was there, and I came up with several possible answers. It could have been serving some obscure decorative purpose—but Eagle told me it was hidden behind a hatbox, so I ruled that one out. It could have been stored there, unused—but Eagle said it was not only running but told the correct time. He never specified if the clock was electric or wind-up, but I ruled out electric for two reasons—there's generally no outlet in a closet, and electric clocks usually hum instead of tick."

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"It was a wind-up clock," Sarah confirmed.

"Generally they won't run more than two days without rewinding. Since the one in Springer's closet was ticking and showing the correct time, it was obviously being rewound. Either Springer or his wife—the only occupants of the apartment—wound the clock and set it regularly."

"Of course."

"But why? Again, not as a decoration because no one could see it. And if it was merely in storage there'd be no reason to keep it running. No, the evidence points to one inescapable conclusion—the clock was rewound because it was in daily use as a timepiece."

"I can see that," Sarah agreed. The breakfast arrived and she began to sip her orange juice.

"Let me continue. Is it logical to believe anyone would keep a clock running in the closet, hidden behind a hatbox, and consult it there regularly to learn the time? Of course not. If the clock was in use, it had to be removed from the closet for this use. But when? At what time of the day, and for what special purpose? Well, we know the clock is an alarm clock. What is the principal function of an alarm clock?"

"To wake people up."

"Exactly. The clock was serving its normal function to awaken someone. It was removed from the front closet each night and returned there in the morning. Well then, *where* was it used? In the bedroom? No, because in the bedroom it could certainly have remained there, on view all day. Or even if a fastidious housekeeper wanted to hide it because of the cracked glass, every bedroom has its own closet. There'd be no need to carry it twice each day through the living room, to and from the *front* closet.

"The inescapable conclusion is that the alarm clock was used daily to awaken someone in a room other than the bedroom. Since the kitchen and bathroom are out of the question, only the living room remains. Someone sleeping in the living room, probably on that sofa or sofa bed, uses the alarm clock to be awakened."

"Of course," she agreed, avoiding Leopold's eyes.

"Next question: *who* uses the alarm clock? A third party unknown to you? Highly unlikely. If someone was staying with them, even on a temporary basis, they'd hardly have failed to mention it to you and Eagle, their closest friends. Besides, a vacationing relative or the like wouldn't need a clock to awaken him.

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He'd be awakened each morning by Ron as he got up for work.

"No, it must be Ron himself who sleeps in the living room, because he's the one who must get up at a certain hour. If Ron were in the bedroom, he could awaken Gert when he came out, just as he could awaken a relative. Again, the conclusion is inescapable—Ron has been banished from his wife's bed. He now sleeps in the living room."

"I can see that," Sarah agreed. "It explains the clock, but it doesn't explain what most puzzles Eagle—that it was *our* clock."

"In a way it does," Leopold said sadly. "The clock couldn't have been stolen at the time of your robbery a year ago. No burglar, entering a house that's empty for a short time, would risk searching a cluttered basement. He could be trapped there by the owner returning unexpectedly, with a tiny basement window as his only means of escape. And the alarm clock doesn't fit the pattern of the other stolen things. No, Sarah, the clock was not stolen. It must have been *given* to Ron Springer."

"Eagle didn't give it to him."

"Of course not. So you must have, Sarah."

"I—" Her right hand jerked out, nearly upsetting the coffee cup.

"Yes, Sarah. You. And if you gave him the clock, you must have known why he needed it. You must have known he was no longer sharing a bed with his wife. It was a fact he didn't tell Eagle, his closest friend, but he did tell you."

"Go on," she said quietly.

"The very fact that he kept the alarm clock and continues to use it, cracked glass and all, shows that it has some special sentimental value for him. After all, he could have bought a new clock for just a few dollars. So here's what we have: he told you a highly intimate secret about himself and his wife, and he accepted from you a gift that he uses despite its defect. The conclusion is obvious, Sarah. You and Ron Springer have a very close, very secret relationship. In fact, you are lovers."

"I can explain the clock. It was an innocent thing."

"If the explanation was innocent, you would have told your husband when he first mentioned it, Sarah." Leopold's voice was low. He didn't want it to carry to the other tables. "All those nights when Eagle was working late . . ."

The spirit seemed to go out of her then. "I was foolish to give him the clock. But I told him it would help him think of me every morning when he woke up. I should have thought of some excuse

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for Eagle, but I never imagined he'd see it there."

"I'm sorry, Sarah."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Do?"

"I think Eagle might kill Ron if he knew. Ron or me or both of us. He has all those guns around the house . . ."

"I won't tell him," Leopold said. "I couldn't do that."

"Thank you."

She seemed about to say something else, but instead she got to her feet and left the table, walking quickly to the exit.

Leopold stayed where he was.

He didn't see them again before he checked out. He tried phoning their room from the lobby around noon, but there was no answer. Perhaps, he thought, it was better this way. If he confronted Cartwright, something in his face might have revealed that he had found the solution.

It was starting to rain as he left the hotel and started to drive north. An annoying rain that would make for a slow trip home.

Why had the clock bothered Cartwright so much in the first place? Was it possible he was already suspicious of Ron and his wife? Leopold thought of the guns Sarah had mentioned, then put it out of his mind. Even if Cartwright followed Leopold's own chain of deductions and arrived at the truth, surely he would do nothing violent.

Back home, back in the office, Fletcher and Connie were waiting for him. "How'd the speech go, Captain?"

"Fine. The speech went fine."

"And our bet?" Connie Trent asked. "How many murders did you get to solve?"

"No murders."

"No crime?"

"No crime. Just an evening with old friends."

Fletcher slipped the two dollar bills out of his wallet. "I guess he wins the bet, Connie."

"I guess so. No murders."

For a moment Leopold sat staring at the two dollar bills on his desk. He was remembering Eagle Cartwright's guns again, and the fear on Sarah's face.

No murders, no crime.

He hoped to God it would remain true.

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a NEW short story by

HENRY T. PARRY

Long ago, when Johnny was only twelve years old, he became a secret mailman . . .

LOVE STORY

by HENRY T. PARRY

Paul Busher kicked me squarely in the rear end and I overbalanced and fell headfirst into the trash barrel.

"I knew I'd catch one of you kids spreadin' that trash all over the alley," he said after he yanked me out and set me on my feet.

My newspapers had slipped out of the strap and when I stooped over to pick them up I was real careful not to get too close to Paul. The *Public Ledger*s, the *North American*s, the one *Journal of Commerce* for Eckert Bros., wholesale grocery, and *The New York Times* for Dr. Sharer. *The Times* was lying in a patch of motor oil and I hated to think of Miss Elizabeth Sharer opening the paper maybe at breakfast and finding the first page all greasy. I wouldn't have cared if it had been one of my other customers on the route. Most of them were too fussy anyway.

If some kid had kicked me I would have been just about wild until I punched him in the nose or banged his head on the macadam to get even, because when somebody hits me I feel lowered and I burn all over. But there wasn't much chance of me punching Paul Busher or getting even with him because he was a big guy, maybe 25 or 30 years old. He played football at State for two years but then he had to come home because he couldn't keep up the courses. Anyway, that's what everybody said.

Busher had a lot of jobs around town, but he didn't keep any of them very long. Right now he was running Fatty Leffler's Poolroom and, everybody said, playing in the poker game that ran there from Saturday noon until Monday morning. It was the poolroom trash barrel that he'd caught me in, only I don't know why

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he was up that early unless it was that he hadn't been to bed yet. After I stocked up on my papers at Charley McCall's Stationery Store, I would go through the alley that ran behind the stores that fronted on Market Street, behind Jones's Pharmacy, Pritchard's Togs for Men, Fatty Leffler's Poolroom, and the other places.

Paul used to park his Ford runabout in the alley behind the poolroom and a couple of times when I was starting out with my papers I'd see him asleep on the seat of the car, sometimes with a bottle of, I guess, whiskey, lying on the pavement. Why he didn't go home I can't say, because Mrs. Busher was a real nice lady. But I guess maybe he was ashamed for his folks to see him this way. Mrs. Busher was always saying how Paul was going to do this or that and better himself but nobody paid much attention any more.

Us kids who delivered papers—there were four of us for the whole town—we had kind of a trade secret and that was when you were up early and walking through the streets and alleys, especially the alleys, before anybody else was awake, you had first whack at whatever had been left behind by whatever happened during the night. I suppose kids who live by the sea must have the same thing on the beaches after the tide goes out. Stuff people lose on the sidewalk walking home, or things people put out with the trash.

One time Whitey Nash, who has Route 1, found a radio that somebody had put out with the trash and he fixed it up so he could get KDKA. In the fall I used to pick up butternuts before the kids on the way to school got a chance at them. What I was looking for in Fatty Leffler's trash barrel were deposit bottles so I could get the money when I returned them. Once I found a pretty good deck of cards there, with only three cards missing.

You got kind of an important feeling, too. We lived at the top of Morgan's Hill and I used to walk down the hill around 5:15 in the morning and see the town in the valley just beginning to turn gray and sometimes with the street lights still on. I passed Dr. Sharer's driveway about halfway down the hill and the light on the big stone post made me think of a lighthouse and I used to think I was something like a guy who steers a ship while all the passengers are asleep, or a locomotive engineer on a long night-passenger run, or maybe one of those guys who fly the mail, guys who are trusted and who get kind of a reward by seeing things other people never get to see, or maybe seeing them differently

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because they are awake and working when everybody else is asleep.

One of the things I didn't like so much about delivering the papers so early was that I hardly ever got to see Miss Elizabeth Sharer. I used to walk up the driveway and stick the paper between the porch banisters and hope she'd come out to get it. But it was always so early that nobody was awake, though once or twice I'd meet Dr. Sharer just as he was coming back from a night call.

Miss Elizabeth Sharer was a real swell girl and I liked her a lot. Sometimes when I was coming home from school she'd be working in the flower garden near the street and she'd stop and talk over the hedge and ask me about school and what I was reading. She gave me the names of lots of swell books and when they didn't have them in the town library she would lend them from her father's library. The Sharers had one room, I guess it used to be the dining room, with the walls all covered with books.

She was real pretty, too, with dark hair and dark eyes, and her skin was kind of pink. Some days she had kind of an excited manner and asked me a lot of questions and seemed awfully happy, and other times she'd be kind of depressed and mopey. But she was always nice to me and listened when I talked to her about what I thought and what I was going to do. She never laughed at me the way my sister Helen does.

If I ever was going to get married—and I don't think I ever will—I would have liked to marry Miss Elizabeth Sharer. But I guess you have to be 21 to get married and that was nine years away and by that time Miss Elizabeth Sharer would be 30 or 40 or something, anyway too old to get married. But I'd think about her a whole lot, how dark and pretty and kind she was. I never liked to hear anyone else talk about her, even when they were saying something good, which mostly they were and that didn't happen too often in our town.

Miss Elizabeth Sharer was kind of like my ideal. I knew I would never get to know anybody else as fine as Miss Elizabeth Sharer. One time my sister Helen said Beth Sharer was stuck up and I got mad at her and then she said it sounded to her like I had a big crush on her. Mom told Helen to hush up and no wonder she wasn't married herself, with a tongue like that.

One morning when I had just wedged *The Times* between the banisters on Dr. Sharer's porch, Miss Elizabeth Sharer came out. She seemed kind of keyed-up and excited and her face had that

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rosy color that made her look beautiful. She asked would I do her a favor. I hoped it would be something big where I could show off, not something like would I stop in at Jones's Pharmacy with a prescription. Because there wasn't anything she asked, anything, that I wouldn't do.

But all I could get out was: "Yeah, Miss Elizabeth. Sure."

"But you'll have to keep it a secret. Now don't promise unless you're really going to keep it a secret. Not ever tell anybody anything. Ever. Just something you and I know about."

I wanted to tell her they could put me on one of those stretching machines they used in the Middle Ages, or in one of those rooms where the walls come together on you like in that story by Edgar A. Poe, but I mumbled something about not ever telling.

"You know the alley downtown behind Jones's Pharmacy and Fatty Leffler's Poolroom and those places?"

"I go through it every morning on my paper route," I told her.

"Well, on the wall of the Leffler Building there's a metal box with telephone wires coming out of it. It has a lid with a hinge. Every morning I want you to open that box and take out any envelope that's in there and bring it along with you on your route and put it in the screw-cap jar in the flowerbed near the street. Bury the jar in the mulch. And any envelopes you find in the jar, you take them down with you early the next morning and put them in the telephone box on Leffler's back wall. Do you have that straight, Johnny? And don't let anyone see you."

"Yeah, Miss Elizabeth, I got it. Envelopes in the telephone box I put in the jar. Envelopes in the jar I put in the telephone box. Early in the morning."

"That's right. But remember, it's our secret, yours and mine. Now, how are you fixed for movie money?"

She picked up her handbag from the porch floor and it sagged open with some junk spilling out. A round gold case rolled under the railing and fell into the shrubbery. I crawled under the bushes and got it and I noticed that it had some words engraved on the outside, but I didn't like to read them standing right there in front of her.

"Thank you, Johnny," she said and put it into her bag. "Daddy brought me that compact from White Springs last year. They were giving them out as souvenirs for the ladies at the convention. Now what about that movie money?"

"Gee, thanks just the same, Miss Elizabeth," I said, "but I

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couldn't take anything. I walk by both those places every day."

"You're sure now?" She looked at me and her eyes were kind of questioning and smiling at the same time, as if she had set up some kind of a problem for me by offering me money and was interested to see what I would do about it, to see whether I would take the money.

"No, I'm sure. I don't mind doing it."

What I wanted to add was "for you," but I wasn't brave enough or sure enough to say it, even though I knew she wouldn't laugh at me.

That was how it started. I didn't know then who would be picking up the messages I left in the telephone box, but I found out soon enough.

I was lying on the swing on the side porch, reading. The sitting-room window was open and Mom was talking on the telephone to Aunt Annie. Mom always talks loud on the phone. Aunt Annie used to live just down the hill from us until she moved to the other side of town, but you'd think it was to China or something because she still wanted to know all the news from our neighborhood.

I wasn't paying any attention to what they were talking about until it seeped into my head that they were talking about Miss Elizabeth Sharer.

"Oh, Doc's busy as usual," Mom was saying. "And they say that Elizabeth has just plain lost her head over that Paul Busher. Doc's put his foot down and says she's to have nothing to do with him. Can't say I blame him, not after that Blaney girl. You know."

Then she went on to say more about how she thought Doc was wrong to have ever sent Elizabeth away to what's-its-name Hall instead of letting her finish high school with the other kids, and how hard it must be on Doc what with Ellie Sharer being in that mental hospital all these years, ever since Elizabeth was ten.

"Poor Elizabeth," Mom said, "I don't see what there is for her around here. Just withering on the vine, she is."

A couple of mornings later I found out that no matter what her father was telling her, Miss Elizabeth Sharer was meeting Paul Busher. And those notes I was carrying between the telephone box and the screw-cap jar must have been to set up the times and places.

I was coming down the hill on my way to get my papers and I

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had just passed Dr. Sharer's place when I saw a Ford coming up the hill. It wasn't too light yet but the car didn't have any headlights on. It stopped a couple of hundred feet down the hill from where I was and backed around to face downhill. I saw Miss Elizabeth Sharer get out of the car and come up the hill towards her house.

I knew she wouldn't want to be seen, so I slipped behind the hedge and she went by just three or four feet from where I was standing, and she was humming to herself. I waited, to give her time to get to her house, then started on down the hill. The Ford was gone. It had coasted down the hill without having the engine turned on. It was Paul Busher's Ford all right. I had seen it sitting in the alley behind Leffler's Poolroom about a hundred times.

That was the first time. Over the summer I must have seen Miss Elizabeth Sharer about ten times coming home just as it was getting light. And as she went by where I was standing behind that hedge I could hear her humming to herself and once or twice she was saying words that sounded like poetry. I was happy to see her happy and at the same time I was jealous over why she was happy. And I was right in the middle, carrying messages but not supposed to know who was taking them out of that telephone wire box.

Then two things happened. I noticed that there wasn't nearly as many messages for me to take out of the telephone box to put into the screw-cap jar as there was going the other way. And I was glad. The other thing was when Dr. Sharer told off Paul Busher.

I went into Fatty Leffler's Poolroom to buy a bottle of soda. I wasn't allowed in there but I thought I would be acting more like the big guys if I could hang around there for a while. So I used the soda as an excuse and I tried to make it last as long as I could.

Paul Busher was shooting some pool and had just said, "Nine ball in the corner pocket" or something like that and he was bent over the table sliding the cue stick back and forth on the back of his left hand and getting ready to shoot when Dr. Sharer walks in and taps him on the shoulder.

"Busher," he said, "I want you to stop seeing my daughter. I will only tell you this once. If you don't stop I shall take the necessary steps."

Paul straightened up and looked down at him and picked up the chalk and chalked his cue. He looked Dr. Sharer right in the

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eye—Paul was chewing a matchstick and he slid it from one side of his mouth to the other, then back again—and said, "Doc, when she gets as tired of it as I'm gettin', maybe she'll stop seein' me."

Paul turned his back on Dr. Sharer and sank the nine ball. Dr. Sharer turned white and walked out, without saying or doing anything. I felt something bad was about to happen, that there was some kind of dangerous fumes in the air between the two men. I was scared because I'd never seen grown men face each other before in a kind of hate and violence that seemed stronger than they were, and I felt that I had seen something that I had better stay away from.

Perk Smith, who is the biggest liar I know, said his brother told him that a couple of days later the boys in the poolroom began making remarks to Paul about him and Miss Elizabeth Sharer and that Paul didn't say anything, he just smiled. I picked a fight with Perk and he gave me a black eye. I had a lot of fights around the end of the summer over one thing or another and I guess I lost more than half of them.

About a week later, a week when I carried a message every day from Miss Elizabeth Sharer's screw-cap jar to Paul Busher's telephone box but none the other way, I was on my way down the hill to pick up my papers at Charley McCall's when I saw Miss Elizabeth Sharer come walking fast up the hill. There wasn't any Ford around this time. As usual, I knew she wouldn't want anyone to see her, so I ducked behind the hedge until she went by and turned into her driveway.

When she came by I could hear her crying, not big open-mouthed bawls the way kids cry, but in low moans and sobs like the hurt was so deep there was almost no way of crying about it. I wanted to go after her and do or say something that would make her stop crying, but I was helpless. What could a kid like me say or do that would be of any help to a great lady like Miss Elizabeth Sharer?

I picked up my papers at Charley McCall's and was going through the alley behind the poolroom when I noticed that Paul Busher's Ford, that was parked there like always, had a leak. I squatted down and looked under the engine but saw that the leak was farther back, probably in the gas tank. I straightened up and went around to the side of the car and there was Paul Busher curled up on the seat just like I'd seen him so many times before.

But this time the rubber mat on the floor was covered with

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blood and there was blood slowly dripping down through the floorboards onto the macadam. This time there wasn't any whiskey bottle on the macadam either.

I hugged my papers to my chest with both arms and started to run back to Charley McCall's. On the way I had to stop to throw up because of what I had seen and because maybe they would think I had something to do with it on account I found it first. Lots of people think Charley McCall is a fuddy-duddy, but when I told him what I had seen he moved plenty fast. He picked up the phone and when Netta Eisley down at the exchange answered, he told her to get Dr. Sharer right away.

"Doc ain't home, Charley," I could hear Netta say in that flat tinny voice you can hear coming out of a telephone receiver. "He's been away all week at some meeting."

"All right. All right. Get me Doc Simmons then. And as soon as he hangs up, get me the police. I believe it's Jim Bowers' turn to be on duty this week."

It didn't take long before a crowd of people, mostly half dressed, began gathering behind Leffler's Poolroom, because once Netta Eisley gets a piece of news the first thing she does is call her mother and from then on it's public property. I hung around the edge of the crowd, not wanting to see Paul Busher again. The people up front kept repeating and passing back what Doc Simmons and Jimmy Bowers were saying.

"Didja hear that? Hear what Doc says? He's dead. Paul's dead. Doc says whoever did it had a knife as sharp as a scalpel."

After they took Paul's body away, and then towed the Ford away, and the crowd had thinned out, Charley McCall said, "Johnny, you look kind of white. You want I should get somebody else to take your route this morning?"

But I told him I could deliver the papers all right and I set off on my route, thinking maybe I had already hung around that place too long.

When I turned into Dr. Sharer's driveway, the house was quiet and shady, and the garden was wet and fresh-smelling and clean and private behind the hedges, and I kept thinking how different it was from the oil and blood on the macadam behind Leffler's Poolroom. I didn't see anybody around when I put *The Times* between the porch banisters, but as I turned to go back down the driveway, Miss Elizabeth Sharer came out and stood at the top of the porch steps.

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She was still dressed the way I had seen her when she came up the hill. Her face seemed like the skin had shrunk and her eyes were darker than ever. She picked up the paper and stood holding it as if she didn't know what to do next or whether she should speak to me. I couldn't be sure she even knew I was there.

I waited at the foot of the steps, looking up at her and thinking that whatever I had done, it wasn't enough for someone as beautiful and kind as Miss Elizabeth Sharer. I wanted to speak to her and tell her, but instead I turned around and ran down the driveway to the street.

At the flowerbed I stopped and pointed down a couple of times to where the glass jar was buried. When I was sure that she saw where I was pointing, I started running up the hill towards home.

Because what I put in the glass jar was what I found that morning on the macadam under Paul Busher's Ford. It was lying in a pool of blood, and blood had dripped on top of it. It was the round gold powder-and-mirror thing, engraved *State Medical Association—White Springs—August 1923*.

The reason I was running up the hill was because I didn't want to be around when she opened the jar and found the note I had put there. I'd be ashamed to be where she could see me when she read the note, because what I wrote was:

Dear Miss Elizabeth Sharer:
I love you.
Respectfully yours,
John Price
Paper boy—Route 2.

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a *NEW* Mr. Strang story by

WILLIAM BRITTAIN

Mr. Leonard Strang, the diminutive old science teacher at Aldershot High School, gives the impression of an aging leprechaun, but actually he is, in and out of his classroom, full of bustle and energy—a little dynamo of a detective. But can you imagine Mr. Strang as an armchair detective? Solving a mystery on the seat of his chemical-stained pants? Not investigating the scene of the crime, not interrogating the witnesses and suspects, not interpreting the physical clues? Well, yes, Mr. Strang can do the sedentary bit with the best of them—shades of Prince Zaleski and the Old Man in the Corner! . . .

MR. STRANG, ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

The voice was like the scrape of a fingernail on a blackboard, cutting through the hushed atmosphere of The Bird and Bottle, Aldershot's poshest restaurant. "Glad you liked my little talk, Paul. I hope the men on your squad realize now that homicide investigations in the big city present problems you just don't have here in the suburbs." Stanley Holbeck took a sip from his martini and set the glass on the table with a thump.

Detective Sergeant Paul Roberts peered furtively at the *maître d'* in the far corner of the dining room and tried to shift his bulky body even lower in his chair. He was beginning to wish he'd never invited Holbeck out from the city. Oh, his earlier talk to the Aldershot police had been all right. The man knew his stuff when it came to urban homicide. But his patronizing manner about everything outside the city limits was beginning to be a pain.

Mr. Strang sat in angry silence, fingering the stem of his wineglass and considering Holbeck in the same way he might

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examine an insect under a microscope. Even though Holbeck was a colleague of his friend Paul Roberts, the diminutive science teacher yearned to bounce his glass off the man's skull. He'd been pleased when Paul had invited him to join Roberts and Holbeck for lunch—a teacher's salary didn't allow for meals at The Bird and Bottle; but now he was beginning to realize that payment would have to come not from his wallet but from his nervous system.

"You teach?" asked Holbeck as if noticing Mr. Strang for the first time.

"Yes. Science. At the high school." Mr. Strang drained the last of his wine. He wished the waiter would bring the food. Not that a mouthful of meat and potatoes would do much toward shutting Holbeck up.

"That's nice. Especially for someone as old as you. Restful, if you know what I mean."

Mr. Strang had just struggled through a week during which he'd been forced to recalculate his budget request three times, had soothed the jangled nerves of a substitute teacher who'd dropped a beaker of sulfuric acid onto the floor of the supply room, had mollified a member of the school board whose son was failing in chemistry, and had broken up innumerable fights between students, most of whom towered over him like teenaged colossi. Teaching could be described in many ways, but the term Holbeck had used wasn't one of them.

"Restful, Mr. Holbeck?" The teacher's self-control would have done credit to the Sphinx.

"Sure. Look, you're there in your school—your ivory tower. You read a few books and come up with a lot of theoretical stuff that sounds great. Trouble is, you're out of touch with the real world."

"Hey, Stan." Roberts finished his Scotch and water as the waiter approached with his laden tray. "Back off, will you? The fact is, I asked Mr. Strang to join us because he's been able to give me quite a lot of help on some of my cases. Especially the ones involving school kids. I think he'd make a damn good detective."

Holbeck shifted as the waiter put his plate down. "Here in Aldershot, maybe," he said. "Back in the city he'd last on the force about two minutes. Now I'm not putting down teachers, mind you. It's just that they're not cut out to be detectives. Teachers have their heads in the clouds. The police need their feet on the ground."

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"Oh . . . Annelida!" snapped Mr. Strang, his patience at an end. "The analytical ability of the Aldershot faculty is in excellent working order, thank you."

Holbeck grinned at Roberts. "Feisty, isn't he?"

"If that means annoyed, I plead guilty," said the teacher. "I daresay that given the same information you have, the faculty of Aldershot High School could handle any criminal case just as efficiently as you, Mr. Holbeck."

"Careful, Mr. Strang," said Roberts. "Remember, he's had training that you—"

"No, wait a minute," Holbeck interrupted. "Mr. Strang here has issued a challenge. I intend to take him up on it."

"Oh?" Mr. Strang looked at Holbeck, puzzled. "How?"

"We've got a case in work now that has some odd angles to it. We'll solve it eventually, of course, but maybe you figure you can come up with the answer without moving out of your chair. Want to try? Or will you admit that I'm right and you're wrong?"

Mr. Strang knew he'd been had. Holbeck had led him on and sprung the trap at precisely the right moment. Still, he'd give anything to wipe that self-satisfied look off Holbeck's face.

"You say I ought to come up with the answer, Mr. Holbeck. What's the question?"

Holbeck's expression was a cat-who-swallowed-the-canary smirk. "How do you hide a body in a fifth-floor luxury apartment—or get rid of it in some way—without anybody being able to find out how you did it? Or, to be more specific, I want you to explain the disappearance of Mr. James Phillimore Earnshaw."

Mr. Strang and Roberts simply stared at one another for a long moment. Finally the detective shrugged. "You're carrying the ball on this one, Mr. Strang," he said.

"We've only been on the case since yesterday," said Holbeck. "A team of ten men are working on it and so far we've come up with nothing. It'll all be in the papers tomorrow. But if you're as good as you say you are, Mr. Strang, you ought to be able to make like Sherlock Holmes or Ellery Queen or those other storybook sleuths who can solve everything without once getting off their duff."

"Both Holmes and Queen were allowed to examine—" Mr. Strang began.

"Got you worried, haven't I?" grinned Holbeck. "Come on. Did you mean what you said or were you bluffing?"

Mr. Strang's eyes glittered. He pushed his chair back from the

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table. "I accept *your* challenge, Mr. Holbeck," he said. "You'll have a solution before we leave this restaurant. I do, of course, have one condition."

"What's that?"

"When comparing them with detectives, I used the word 'faculty'—meaning teachers, plural. I therefore reserve the right to call on any of my colleagues who I feel might be able to assist me. It's Saturday, and most of them ought to be available."

"Hey!" said Roberts. "This could get to be pretty expensive. If we ask anybody to come here, they'd have to order a meal, and—"

"Exactly my point," said the teacher. "If I solve the case, Mr. Holbeck pays for everything. If not, I foot the bill."

"How about it, Paul?" asked Holbeck. "Mind spending a little more time here?"

"It's fine with me. I thought I was going to have to pick up the check. But, Mr. Strang, are you sure you can afford—"

"Mr. Holbeck will be paying," said the teacher with assurance. "Now, let's get on with it. What happened to Mr. Earnshaw?" He took a pen and a small notebook from a pocket of his jacket.

"The call came in about seven o'clock last night," Holbeck began. "A Mrs. Everett Keach, who lives in the Bartholomew Apartments. That's a fancy new place over on the east side."

"I thought you said this involved a man named Earnshaw," said the teacher.

"It does. Give me time. Mrs. Keach lives in Apartment 4-B. Fourth floor, right next to the stairway. When the two officers—Berman and Pollard—got there, she was waiting out in the hall for them. She wouldn't let the men inside her apartment because she'd just had her rugs shampooed, and she wanted to keep them clean.

"She didn't say a word at first. Just kept puffing on a cigarette in one of those long fancy holders as if she were a volcano. And she was pointing up towards the fifth floor. Berman and Pollard knew immediately what the trouble was."

"And what was it?" asked Mr. Strang.

"A terrible row going on upstairs. A man and a woman were shouting at each other, and you could hear things thumping on the floor. At the same time a record was blaring away—*The Warsaw Concerto*. Berman's a music buff, and he recognized it. The whole thing must have sounded like the Normandy invasion."

Holbeck's expression registered wry amusement at humanity's

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foibles. "Mrs. Keach said the apartment was rented to a Rachel Earnshaw. She scarcely knew the woman. Mrs. Earnshaw kept pretty much to herself, apparently, and—"

"Wait a minute," said the teacher. "You said *Mrs.* Earnshaw. That's strange."

"Why?" asked Roberts.

"Paul, Mr. Holbeck just said the apartment was rented to Rachel Earnshaw. But if she were married, wouldn't it be more likely the place would be in her husband's name?"

"Not bad, Mr. Strang," said Holbeck. "Not bad at all. Mrs. Earnshaw is a divorcee. In fact, that's what started all the trouble. It seems her husband came back."

"Oh?"

"Yes. He even got the wrong apartment at first. Mrs. Keach said he knocked on the door of her place and asked for his wife. She described him as a little guy, but stocky. It rained last night, and his coat and hat were soaked. She said even his mustache looked as if it had gone through a car wash."

"How long did he talk to Mrs. Keach?" asked Mr. Strang.

"Just a minute or so. She didn't even take the chain off the door. Sent him right upstairs."

"And how long after that did the fight start?"

"Not more than a couple of minutes. Mrs. Keach tried ignoring it for a while. Then she got hold of the doorman who suggested she call the police."

"Is that when you entered the case?" asked Mr. Strang, finishing the last of his salad.

"Not quite. The two officers talked to Mrs. Keach for about five or ten minutes and—"

"With a violent argument going on right above their heads?" asked the teacher in amazement.

"Yes. They were kind of hoping it would end by itself. Oh, I don't blame them. People in places like the Bartholomew Apartments are sometimes well connected politically. No sense getting them angry if you don't have to. And it looked at first as if it were going to work. Then all of a sudden the argument stopped. No slowing down, no final remarks, the way these things usually end. It just cut off." Holbeck clapped his hands together. "Bang! Like that."

"But I take it something else happened."

Holbeck nodded. "The officers heard the door up there opening.

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Then Mrs. Earnshaw was screaming from inside the apartment: 'You get back in here! Don't you dare walk out on me!' Right after that the door slammed shut again. And all that time the record was playing—loud. That's when Berman and Pollard went upstairs—on the double. Mrs. Earnshaw turned off the phonograph and opened the door as soon as they rang the buzzer."

"Could you describe her?" asked Mr. Strang, his pencil poised.

"Of course. I saw her later myself. She looked as if she were modeling for the Statue of Liberty. A big tall woman. I'd have been scared to argue with her if she were my wife. She was dressed as if she were going out for the evening. A long green gown with white stripes going up and down it, high heels, gloves, hair done up high on her head the way an expensive beauty parlor might have fixed it—the works. Anyway, the men asked her if she and her husband would please keep the noise down. That's when she gave them that queer answer."

"And what was that?"

" 'Why, officers,' she said, 'I haven't seen my husband in years. I live here alone'."

"So the guy who came to see her wasn't her husband, huh?" chuckled Roberts. "I'll bet he was embarrassed when the patrolmen saw him."

"That's what I'm getting at," answered Holbeck. "Here's where the case started coming apart. Mrs. Earnshaw took Pollard and Berman through her whole apartment."

"And?"

"And there wasn't anyone else there!"

While Roberts and Mr. Strang looked at each other, the waiter came and cleared the table, leaving three cups and a fresh pot of coffee.

"The officers sat down with Mrs. Earnshaw and asked her what all the noise was about. She told them she'd been practising a reading for a drama class. Only she couldn't show them a script, and when they asked about the man's voice she denied there'd been one. Finally they got on the subject of her husband, James Phillimore Earnshaw. Seems he walked out on her about three years ago. She swore she hasn't seen him since, except for the divorce proceedings, and she said nobody came to her door all day."

Holbeck swabbed his brow with a napkin. "That's when I got called in on the case."

"Earlier," said Mr. Strang slowly, "you mentioned something

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about Earnshaw's body. What was it that made you think this man, whoever he was, was killed? Why couldn't he have just left the place?"

"Well, the stairs are out," answered Holbeck, "because the officers were one flight down, talking to Mrs Keach. They'd have seen him, positively. And the elevator door is right across the hall from the Keach apartment. A light goes on and a little bell rings whenever the car passes each floor." He shook his head. "But no light and no bell."

"So no elevator," said the teacher. "But if he went to another apartment? Or upstairs?"

"We checked. Everybody else on the fifth floor heard the argument, too. But they didn't see anybody. And Earnshaw couldn't have gone upstairs because there are only five floors in the building. And the door to the roof was not only locked but stuck tight."

"Fire escape?" suggested Roberts.

Holbeck turned thumbs down. "The windows of the apartments are all sealed. 'Total climate control,' they call it. You'd have to remove a whole pane of glass to get to the fire escape. And that can't be done without breaking off the plastic pins holding the panes in place. The pins were intact."

"Granted there was a mysterious disappearance," said Mr. Strang, "but I still want to know what made you consider the possibility of murder."

"There's enough evidence to fill a truck," replied Holbeck, "if only we can put it all together. First of all, we found a big carving knife in the middle of the living-room floor. And that isn't the weirdest thing."

"What is the weirdest thing?"

"One of the living-room walls had just been repainted. I mean, it wasn't even dry. Bright red and still tacky. Whoever had done the painting hadn't bothered to put down a dropcloth. The rug was all spattered, and the things that had been hanging on the wall were all piled in one corner of the room."

"Pictures?"

"Yes. Well, framed opera programs, really. Seems that several years ago Mrs. Earnshaw was a professional opera singer."

Holbeck took a notebook from his pocket and consulted it. "There were three framed programs. In one, Rachel Earnshaw was listed as Azucena in *Il Trovatore* at La Scala. Then she was Erda in Wagner's *Das Rheingold* for the Vienna State Opera.

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And there was a big one from Covent Garden that had her listed as Ulrica in *A Masked Ball*.

"According to her, at one time she'd been quite good. Then she got married, and her husband forced her to give up her career. She wanted to make a comeback, and that's why they got a divorce. She told Berman that she'd arranged a concert booking and if the critics were good to her she might be able to join one of the city's opera companies. Her dream was to sing *Carmen* someday."

Mr. Strang was jotting down notes rapidly. "Let me get this straight," he said. "James Earnshaw—or whoever was impersonating him—had to be in the apartment, even though his wife denied it. I assume the place was thoroughly searched?"

"Yes, Mr. Strang." Holbeck looked at the teacher and sighed. "This is the kind of thing we're trained to do. First of all, Berman and Pollard went through the place, looking for a body. I mean something that big, there aren't many places in an apartment to put it. Then I worked out my theory."

"I was hoping for a theory," exclaimed Mr. Strang delightedly. "What was it?"

"Theories are part of what I get paid for," said Holbeck with some annoyance. "Anyway, the playing of that record kept bothering me. I mean, when a couple of people are arguing they usually try to keep it down, at least at first, so the neighbors won't hear. But these two sounded as if they wanted to wake the dead. So I figured maybe the music was just sound effects to hide any noises Mrs. Earnshaw made while disposing of the body. It even occurred to me the argument might have been faked—on tape or something—to conceal any screams during the actual murder."

Mr. Strang nodded his head appreciatively. "In your own words, Mr. Holbeck, 'not bad'. My respect for you is increasing by leaps and bounds. What did you come up with?"

"Well, being a singer, Mrs. Earnshaw had a hi-fi setup the likes of which you wouldn't believe. Turntable, AM-FM radio, tape deck—everything. There was a record of *The Warsaw Concerto* on the player, of course. So I put one man to checking all her records and tapes to see if he could come up with anything unusual."

"And?"

"Nothing. Just spot checking every record and tape took him most of the night. She's got quite a collection. But to tell the truth, I didn't expect him to have any success. So I put a team of men on another search of the apartment and even sent one man

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downstairs to examine the incinerator. This time we were looking for one of those cassettes like the ones that recording tapes come on. They're only about the size of a pack of cigarettes, but my boys are real pros. They gave that apartment the fine-tooth-comb treatment. Even opened up the sofa cushions and the plumbing. They didn't find anything. My point here is that they couldn't possibly have missed a body."

"What about blood?" asked the teacher.

"No blood. Anywhere."

Holbeck pushed his chair back from the table with a sigh. "She's got us up a tree. I had her go to a friend's place, but I set a police guard on the apartment itself. So we'll find him. Oh, we'll look a little foolish when the papers hit the streets tomorrow. But by this time next week Mrs. Rachel Earnshaw will be booked and behind bars."

He poured a second cup of coffee. "Anyway, there's your problem, Mr. Strang. What happened to Mr. James Earnshaw? We have an eyewitness who saw him go up to the apartment, so he's *got* to be there. Where's he hiding? Or where did his wife put the body?"

The teacher didn't answer. Instead he peered owlishly at his own scrawled writing in the notebook. "You're sure you haven't left anything out?" he asked Holbeck finally.

"Not a thing. How about it? Are you willing to admit you're stumped?"

"Stumped? With a knife in the middle of the living room and a whole wall sloshed with crimson paint? Why, I haven't had so much fun since I read *The Hound of the Baskervilles*."

"We figure the new paint was on account of blood on the wall," said Holbeck to Roberts. "And her fancy get-up was to hide the fact that she'd been doing the painting."

Paul Roberts shook his head helplessly.

Mr. Strang signaled to the waiter.

"*Plus de café, messieurs?*"

"You can cut that out, Mickey," said the teacher, polishing his black-rimmed glasses on his necktie. "The luncheon crowd has left, and there's nobody here but us chickens. It's a pity your boy never inherited your ability with languages. As it is, it looks as if he'll be repeating Spanish next term."

"Yeah, I guess you're right, Mr. Strang," said the waiter sadly. "But at least he's improving in math. What can I do for you?"

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The teacher tore a page from his notebook. "I want you to call these three people," he said. "Tell them I'd like them to come over here—within the hour, if possible. Mention my name."

"What if they can't make it?"

"Say there's a free meal in it. They'll be here like a shot. And you can move that next table closer. When my committee meets I want them all to have enough room."

"Committee?" said Holbeck, looking curiously at the teacher. "What committee?"

"You said I could have faculty help solving this problem." Mr. Strang spread his hands wide. "Behold the first meeting of my Committee to Rebuke Uppity Detectives. I give you the acronym with my best wishes."

"Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Strang," said Roberts, "that you have actually made something out of what Stan told you?"

"Of course, Paul. That is, unless he's left something out. If so, he pays the bill anyway, since one of the conditions of this whole exercise was that I know exactly as much as the police."

"I've told you everything we've learned," murmured Holbeck. "But if you're so sure of yourself, why do you need the others?"

"Two reasons," Mr. Strang replied. "First of all, there are a few things I need to confirm. Second and more important, I'm certain all those I've invited would enjoy a meal in a fine restaurant as long as somebody else is paying."

The first to enter the restaurant, some twenty minutes later, was a middle-aged man who seemed more than a little ill at ease in the suit he was wearing. "Mr. Holbeck, this is Edward Witkin of our school-maintenance staff," said the teacher. "He's not exactly on the faculty, but I trust he comes under the terms of our agreement. After all, he is employed by the school district."

"Sure, sit down," said Holbeck. "Might as well get everybody into the act."

Alma Brubaker and Doris Nettles arrived together. Miss Brubaker, a gorgeous black woman dressed in the height of fashion, taught choral music. Mrs. Nettles, plump and matronly, was head of the home-economics department.

The teacher directed the three newcomers to a corner of the room. There he spoke to them for several minutes in whispers. Finally the four returned to the table where the two detectives were waiting impatiently.

When introductions had been completed, Mr. Strang saw that

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the others were seated, then tapped his glass for attention. "I'd like to get this whole affair completed as soon as possible," he began. "I'm sure Mr. Holbeck will want to be getting back to the city, if only to tell his colleagues how a group of schoolteachers solved his mystery."

Quickly he outlined the terms of the bet he'd made with Holbeck and, in greater detail, went over the story of the investigation into the disappearance of James Earnshaw.

Then he removed his glasses, holding them lightly in his right hand. His left was plunged deep into a pocket of his rumpled jacket.

"Now let's explore some possibilities concerning the missing man," he declaimed, for all the world as if he were speaking to a class of high-school students. "Assuming Mr. Earnshaw was killed by his wife, she was immediately faced with the problem of disposing of the body. Burial was out of the question—only moments after the argument ended the police were pounding up the stairs. But could the body have been walled up inside the apartment? Perhaps behind a secret panel. To see if Mrs. Earnshaw resorted to a method made popular by Edgar Allan Poe, I turn to my first guest expert, Mr. Witkin. What do you say, Eddie? Is the body moldering under the floorboards?"

Mr. Witkin looked up at the teacher and shook his head. "No way, Mr. Strang. These new buildings—even the luxury apartments—have walls as thin as tissue paper. Nothing more than some dry wall or thin paneling laid over the studs. Nowhere near enough room to hide a body."

"Wait a minute," interrupted Holbeck. "How can you be so sure, Mr. Witkin? Have you ever been in the Bartholomew Apartments?"

"Nope. But it stands to reason, don't it, that if that argument was heard so clear by all the neighbors, there ain't much thickness to the walls. In the old buildings you could fire a cannon in one apartment and not wake up a baby sleeping next door. Ah, they don't make 'em the way they used to."

He lowered his voice to a whisper. "How'd I do, Mr. Strang?"

"Admirably, Eddie. Enjoy your meal."

"Very well, so James Earnshaw wasn't in the apartment when Berman and Pollard got there," said Holbeck.

"Ah, now we're getting somewhere. Secondary inference: he wasn't murdered. His wife simply had no time to dispose of the body."

"Well—" began Holbeck reluctantly.

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"Oh, come on, Stan," snapped Roberts. "Give an inch."

Holbeck shrugged. "All right, no murder."

"And once we eliminate the murder theory," said Mr. Strang, "I hope that at least for the time being we can call a halt to further consideration of that painted wall and the knife. For muddling up a problem, those two factors take the cake."

"You have to explain them some way."

"All in good time, Mr. Holbeck."

"So James Earnshaw got out of the apartment under his own steam," mused Holbeck. "But how? He couldn't have gone downstairs without Mrs. Keach and the police either seeing him or hearing the elevator bell or seeing the elevator light."

"The conclusion is inescapable then," said the teacher with a smile. "James Earnshaw did not leave the apartment."

"But if he didn't leave . . . and he's not there . . ."

"We arrive at the only possible answer remaining to us. James Earnshaw doesn't exist!"

Mr. Strang looked around triumphantly at the small group of diners.

"Why—why he has to!" sputtered Holbeck.

"Really?" said Mr. Strang coolly. "How can you be so sure? Tell me, did you check whether or not Rachel Earnshaw was ever married?"

"No, I—" Holbeck groped about with one hand like a blind man. "I just assumed—"

"As did everyone else. You assumed there was a James Earnshaw for only one reason—because Rachel Earnshaw told you so."

"But he was seen by a witness," said Holbeck. "The little man who talked to Mrs. Keach—what about him?"

"Isn't it obvious? That 'man' had to be Rachel Earnshaw herself."

"Aha!" Holbeck pointed an accusing finger. "There's where I've got you, Mr. Strang. There is no way I'm going to believe that. The person Mrs. Keach saw at her door was a man."

"Mrs. Keach," replied the teacher as if scolding a student for a minor infraction of the rules, "saw a figure which she described as short and stocky. Aside from that, all she observed was a coat, hat, and mustache, all soaked with water. Nowhere in her account was there any mention of the person inside all this clothing and facial hair. And by her own admission Mrs. Keach and Mrs.

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Earnshaw were almost complete strangers to one another. It's no wonder the poor woman didn't recognize who was at her door."

"Come on! The man she spoke to was short. And I saw Mrs. Earnshaw myself. She is tall."

"I think it's now up to you, Mrs. Nettles," said Mr. Strang.

The home-economics teacher got to her feet like a queen addressing her subjects. "Height, as I've told the girls in my classes, is a relative matter, Mr. Holbeck. A woman of five feet ten inches would be considered tall. A man of that height would be only near average."

"But—"

"Please don't interrupt. I further understand that when you saw Rachel Earnshaw she was wearing high heels and her hair was upswept, two things guaranteed to add at least inches to a woman's height. Finally, the vertical stripes in her dress—designed to create the illusion of a taller woman. Under the circumstances I'm surprised you didn't mistake her for the Jolly Green Giant. But in flat shoes, with her hair under a felt hat and crouched a bit in an overcoat, it wouldn't have been hard for her to appear to be a short stocky man. Especially if the illusion of masculinity were enhanced by a false mustache."

"Umm. But how about the voice? I mean, a woman's voice is usually higher pitched than a man's. Wouldn't Mrs. Keach have noticed that?"

With a tiny smile Doris Nettles sat down and applied herself to her filet mignon while Mr. Strang waved a hand in the direction of Alma Brubaker.

"I've never heard this Earnshaw woman speak, of course," said the music teacher. "But those framed opera programs rang a bell. Azucena, Erda, and Ulrica. All parts written to be sung in the same vocal range, Mr. Holbeck. And while the *Carmen* role is usually sung in a higher register, Mme. Charles Cahier once—"

"What are you driving at, Miss Brubaker?"

"Mrs. Earnshaw was a contralto—the lowest female singing voice."

"You're saying she could sound like a man and bring it off. Is that it?"

"Right on, Mr. Holbeck. At least for a short time. Now may I get back to my lobster? It's delicious."

"Thus end the contributions of our guest experts," said Mr. Strang. "Enjoy your meal. And be sure to thank Mr. Holbeck."

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"I'm not finished," said the detective. "What about the argument Mrs. Keach and the neighbors heard coming through the walls? It must have lasted at least fifteen minutes. And Miss Brubaker herself said Rachel Earnshaw could only make the man's voice sound convincing for a short time."

Mr. Strang shook his head in mock sadness. "Oh, Mr. Holbeck, you were so close to the answer." He held his thumb and forefinger with only a fraction of an inch separating them. "So very close."

"What do you mean?"

"The phony argument was—indeed, had to be—on tape, just as you suspected. And when it ended—'Bang!', to use your own expression—it was merely the switching off of the tape deck as it was feeding in over the sound of the record. I have no doubt that the resourceful Rachel Earnshaw had little trouble in persuading one of her male acquaintances to dub in the man's part of the argument beforehand. On the hi-fi, with a little pounding of a chair on the floor and walls, it must have been most convincing. Your only error, Mr. Holbeck, was in assuming that because 'Mr. Earnshaw' was seen and heard by the neighbors, he had to exist apart from Rachel herself."

Holbeck waved an admonishing finger at the teacher. "That apartment was thoroughly searched by some of the best men in the business and no tape was—"

"Of course no tape was found. Confound it, man, I'm willing to concede the ability of your team of detectives. But they could search the Earnshaw place until doomsday and still find nothing. You persist in this hangup that all the evidence is *inside* her apartment."

"But where else—"

"Cast your imagination back to the time when your uniformed men were first talking to Mrs. Keach. Just before they went upstairs, they heard—what?"

Holbeck wrinkled his brow. "The door upstairs opened. Mrs. Earnshaw screamed to her husband to come back inside. Then the door closed again."

"Ah, but according to our present hypothesis, there was no husband. Therefore, in spite of what she was heard to say, she must have opened the door to let *herself* out."

"You think the tape is in the hall outside her apartment? Out of the question! One look and you could see for yourself. That hall

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is all chrome and wood paneling. Even the carpet is tacked down. One glance out there and we could tell—"

"You were looking for something out of place, an article you wouldn't expect to find in the hall. But if you'd reread *The Purloined Letter*—"

"I tell you there's noplace in that hall to hide—"

"Isn't there? You told me that Mrs. Keach, on the fourth floor, wouldn't let your men into her apartment because she'd just cleaned the rugs. An extraordinarily neat woman, wouldn't you say?"

"I guess so, but—"

"And yet she remained in the hall talking to your men for some five or ten minutes. And all that time she was smoking a cigarette. Certainly this paragon of cleanliness wouldn't allow herself to dirty the rug outside her own door. So tell me, Mr. Holbeck, what did she do with her cigarette ashes?"

"She put them in the ashtray, of course—one of those big aluminum things they have on every floor. Looks like a fancy bucket filled with—"

Suddenly Holbeck looked at Roberts and swallowed loudly. "Sand!" he said in an awed voice.

Mr. Strang nodded. "Usually those ashtrays are quite deep, too. A tape cassette pushed down far enough into that sand would still allow cigarettes to be snuffed out above it without danger of discovery, in the event your men used the one on the fifth floor. Even a quick raking with the fingers wouldn't uncover the hiding place. But I think if you pour out the sand from the ashtray outside the Earnshaw apartment, you'll find the missing 'argument' tape buried there. With the area under guard, it's unlikely Rachel Earnshaw has retrieved it."

Roberts and the teacher grinned at one another.

"Let me get this straight," Holbeck said. "What you're saying is that last night Mrs.—or Miss, we've still got to check on that—Earnshaw dressed up in a man's clothes and went down to Mrs. Keach's apartment?"

"Yes. But first she painted the living-room wall and planted the knife. Red herrings, of course, simply to give your men some interesting and misleading clues to work on. Then, after donning her masculine disguise, she probably stood in the shower for a minute or so to get the proper degree of wetness and suggest that she'd come in from the outside."

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"Wild, but certainly possible. And according to your guest experts she could have convinced Mrs. Keach she was a man."

"Exactly. Then upstairs and into her own clothing and a new hairdo. A wig, probably."

"Then, with all the false clues planted, she started the 'argument' tape. The record, too, for extra noise and confusion. And a little pounding on the floor to make sure Mrs. Keach got angry enough to call the police. And while they were talking to Mrs. Keach, Rachel Earnshaw hid the tape in the ashtray out in the hall."

"That's it. Naturally, if you find the tape it will prove I'm right. Well, are you satisfied, Mr. Holbeck? Ready to pick up the check for this little adventure in armchair detection? You now have a perfectly logical and coherent explanation of how James Earnshaw 'disappeared'."

"Just a second. There's still the problem of the motive."

"Well, eventually you were bound to discover the truth—that she'd been putting you on. She had not, however, committed any crime. You simply drew some erroneous conclusions."

"But why did she go to all that trouble?"

"Purely as conjecture, I'd say the clue is that we have a woman who's attempting a comeback in an operatic career. Publicity would do her a world of good, and you yourself said the papers would be full of the case tomorrow. 'The Man Who Disappeared,' followed by 'Operatic Hopeful Outwits Police.' Why, people would flock to her concerts just to see the person behind it all."

"Then the whole thing's a publicity stunt." Holbeck considered this for a moment.

Silence.

"All right, I concede," said Holbeck grudgingly. He signaled for the waiter, at the same time producing a well-worn wallet.

"*Merci, monsieur*," said the waiter, eyeing the bills Holbeck placed on the tray. Then he swiveled his head and saluted Mr. Strang with a surreptitious wink.

"You will have to excuse me," said Holbeck, heading for the door. "I've got a train to catch back to the city. There's an ashtray at the Bartholomew Apartments I want to look into. And if I find what you say is in it, I'm going to sit down at my desk and write one hundred times: 'I will not open my big mouth to the teacher.' When you're in the neighborhood, Mr. Strang, drop in. Roberts was right. I wouldn't mind at all having you on my staff."

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After Holbeck's departure Paul Roberts leaned confidentially toward Mr. Strang. "You conned him," said the detective. "I don't know how you pulled it off with somebody as sharp as he is, but you conned him."

The teacher's face was a study in wide-eyed wonder. "Why, Paul, I can't imagine what you're talking about."

"Yes, you can, you wrinkled old wizard. I know you. There's no way you'd let yourself be roped into a deal like that unless you were damn sure of winning. I've got the feeling you knew all along that Rachel Earnshaw was pulling a fast one. That's right, isn't it?"

Mr. Strang's grin was that of a satanic imp. He slipped his glasses back on. Then, his eyes shining merrily, he nodded his head.

"What tipped you off?" Roberts asked.

"The name, Paul. It seems Rachel Earnshaw has a sense of humor, too."

"What name?"

"The one she gave her imaginary husband. James Phillimore Earnshaw. You see, it comes from one of those books Holbeck accused us teachers of reading in our ivory towers."

"Books? What books?"

"The Sherlock Holmes stories. In several of them Watson mentions cases that he had never recorded. One of those unchronicled tales is 'that of Mr. James Phillimore, who, stepping back into his own house to get his umbrella, was never more seen in this world'."

Mr. Strang stoked up his briar pipe and tried unsuccessfully to arrange his wizened features to resemble the hawklike Holmesian visage.

"If memory serves, you'll find it in *The Problem of Thor Bridge*."

"Q"

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Manuscript Number 2000 introduced another English writer virtually unknown to readers on this side of the Atlantic—Kem Bennett, and his story, "Demon Scientist Strikes Again!"

Manuscript Number 3000: Rufus King's "The Perfect Stranger"—one of the strangest tales we have ever published.

Manuscript Number 4000: Erle Stanley Gardner's "The Clue of the Runaway Blonde"—one of Mr. Gardner's best novelets.

And now we publish Manuscript Number 5000—another milestone in EQMM's progress. It is fitting that our 5000th manuscript purchase should be a story by Ruth Rendell. Her stories in EQMM have become more and more admired. One of her 1974 stories, "The Fallen Curtain" in our issue of August 1974, won the highest possible short-story honor of the year—the coveted Edgar awarded by Mystery Writers of America to the best new mystery short story published in American magazines and books during 1974.

Ruth Rendell's newest story takes us to London's Holland Park, which has a shuddery legend. It seems that people who walk in Holland Park often see their doubles. And superstition (or is it superstition?) has it that if you see your double, you will die within the year . . .

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In one of his reviews in "The New York Times," Anatole Broyard asked: "How much of a story does an author have to give a reader before asking him to imagine the rest?" Case in point: this bittersweet, uncanny story . . .

MEETING IN THE PARK

by RUTH RENDELL

Strange disheveled women who had the air of witches sat round the table in Mrs. Cleasant's drawing room. One of them, a notable medium, seemed to be making some sort of divination with a pack of Tarot cards. Later on, when it got dark, they would go on to table-turning. The aim was to raise up the spirit of Mr. Cleasant, one year dead, and also, Peter thought with anger and disgust, to frighten Lisa out of her wits.

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Cleasant when Lisa came back with her coat on.

Peter answered for her. "I'm taking her for a walk in Holland Park, and then we'll have a meal somewhere."

"Holland Park?" said the medium. If a corpse could have spoken it would have had a voice like hers. "Take care, be watchful. That place has a reputation."

The witch women looked at her expectantly, but the medium returned to her Tarot and was eyeing the Empress which she had brought within an inch of two of her long nose. Peter was sickened by the lot of them. Six months to go, he thought, and he'd take Lisa out of this—this coven.

It was a Sunday afternoon in spring, and the air in the park was fresh and clean, almost like country air. Peter drew in great gulps of it, cleansing himself of the atmosphere of that drawing room.

He wished Lisa would unwind, be less nervous and strung-up. The hand he wasn't holding kept going up to the charm she wore on a chain round her neck or straying out to knock on wood as they passed a fence.

Suddenly she said, "What did that woman mean about the park's reputation?"

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"Some occult rubbish. How should I know? I hate that sort of thing."

"So do I," she said, "but I'm afraid of it."

"When we're married you'll never have to have any more to do with it. I'll see to that. God, I wish we could get married now or that you'd come and live with me till we can."

"I can't marry you till I'm eighteen without Mummy's permission, and if I live with you they'll make me a ward of court."

"Surely not, Lisa."

"Anyway, there's only six months to wait. It's hard for me, too. Don't you think I'd rather live with you than with Mummy?"

The childish rejoinder made him smile. "Come on, try and look a bit more cheerful," he said, "I want to take your photograph. If I can't have you, I'll have your picture."

They had reached a sunny open space where he sat her on a log and told her to smile. He got the camera out of its case. "Don't look at those people, darling. Look at me."

It was a pity the man and the girl had chosen that moment to sit down on the wooden seat.

"Lisa!" he said sharply, and then he wished he hadn't, for her face crumpled with distress. He went up to her. "What's the matter, Lisa?"

"Look at that girl," she said.

"All right. What about her?"

"She's exactly like me. She's my double."

"Nonsense! What makes you say that? Her hair's the same color and you're about the same build, but apart from that there's no resemblance. She's years older than you and she's—"

"Peter, you must see it! She could be my twin. Look, the man with her has noticed. He looked at me and said something to her and then they both looked."

Peter couldn't see more than a superficial similarity. "Well, supposing she were your double, which I don't for a moment admit, so what? Why get in such a state about it?"

"Don't you know about doubles? Don't you know that if you see your double, you're seeing your own death, that you will die within the year?"

"Oh, Lisa, come *on*! I never heard anything so foolish. This is more rubbish you've picked up from those crazy old witches. It's just sick superstition."

But nothing he could say calmed her. Her face had grown white

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and her eyes troubled. Worried for her rather than angry, he put out his hand and helped her to her feet. She leaned against him, trembling, and he saw she was clutching her amulet.

"Let's go," he said. "We'll find another place to take your picture. Don't look at her if it upsets you. Forget her."

When they had gone off along the path, the man on the seat said to his companion, "Couldn't you really see that girl was the image of you?"

"I've already told you, no."

"Of course you look a good deal older and harder, I'll give you that."

"Thank you."

"But you're almost her double. Take away a dozen years and a dozen love affairs, and you'd *be* her double."

"Stephen, if you're trying to start another row, just say so and I'll go home."

"I'm not starting anything. I'm fascinated by an extraordinary phenomenon. Holland Park's known to be a strange place. There's a legend you can see your own double here."

"I never heard that."

"Nevertheless, my dear Zoe, it is so. 'The Magus, Zoroaster, my dead child, /Saw his own image walking in the garden'."

"Who said that?"

"Shelley. Superstition has it that if you see your own image you will die within the year."

She turned slowly to look at him. "Do you want me to die within the year, Stephen?"

He laughed. "Oh, you won't die. You didn't see her, she saw you. And it frightened her. He was taking her photograph, did you see? I wish I'd asked him to take one of you two together. Why don't we see if we can catch up with them?"

"You know, you have a sick imagination."

"No, only a healthy curiosity. Come along now, if we walk fast we'll catch them at the gate."

"If it amuses you," said Zoe.

Peter and Lisa didn't see the other couple approaching. They were walking with their arms round each other, and Peter had managed to distract her from the subject of her double by talking of their wedding plans. At the northern gate someone behind him called out, "Excuse me!" and he turned to see the man who had been sitting on the seat.

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"Yes?" Peter said rather stiffly.

"I expect you'll think this is frightful cheek, but I saw you back there and I was absolutely—well, struck by the likeness between my girl friend and the young lady with you. There is a terrific likeness, isn't there?"

"I don't see it," said Peter, not daring to look at Lisa. What a beastly thing to happen! He felt dismay. "Frankly, I don't see any resemblance at all."

"Oh, but you *must*. Look, what I want is for you to do me an enormous favor and take a picture of them together. Will you? Do say you will."

Peter was about to refuse, and not politely, when Lisa said, "Why not? Of course he will. It's such a funny coincidence, we ought to have a record of it."

"Good girl! We'd better introduce ourselves then, hadn't we? I'm Stephen Davidson and this is Zoe Conti."

"Lisa Cleasant and Peter Milton," said Peter, still half stunned by Lisa's warm response.

"Hello, Lisa and Peter. Lovely to know you. Now you two girls go and stand over there in that spot of sunshine."

So Peter took the photograph and said he'd send Stephen and Zoe a print when the film was developed. She gave him the address of the flat she and Stephen shared and he noted it was in the next street but one to his. They might have walked there together, which was what Stephen, remarking on this second coincidence, seemed to want. But seeing the tense strained look in Lisa's eyes, Peter refused, and they separated on Holland Park Avenue.

"You didn't mind about not going with them, did you?" said Lisa.

"Of course not. I'd rather be alone with you."

"I'm glad," she said, and then, "I did it for you."

He understood. She had done it for him, to prove to him she could conquer her superstitious terrors. For his sake, because he wanted it, she would try. He took her in his arms and kissed her.

She leaned against him. He could feel her heart beating. "I won't tell anyone else about it," she said, and he knew she meant her mother and the witch women.

When the film was developed he didn't show it to her. He would send Zoe and Stephen their print and that would end the whole

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incident. But when he was putting it into an envelope, he realized he would have to write a covering note, which was a bore as he didn't like writing letters. Besides, if he was going to take it to the post, he might as well take it to their home. And one evening he did.

He had no intention of going in. But as he was slipping the envelope into the letter box, Zoe appeared behind him on the steps.

"Come in and have a drink."

He couldn't think of an excuse, so he accepted. She led him up two flights of stairs, looking at the photograph as she went.

"So much for this supposed fantastic likeness," she said. "Could you ever see it?"

Peter said he couldn't, wondering how Lisa could have been so silly as to fancy she had seen her double in this woman of 30, who tonight had a drawn and haggard look. "It was mostly in your friend's imagination," he said as they entered the flat. "We'll see what he says about it now."

For a moment she didn't answer. When her reply came it was brusque. "He's left me."

Peter was embarrassed. "I'm sorry." He looked into her face, at the eyes whose dark sockets were like bruises. "Are you very unhappy?"

"I won't take an overdose, if that's what you mean. We'd been together for four years. It's hard to take. But I won't bore you with it. Let's talk about something else."

Peter had only meant to stay a few minutes, but the minutes grew into an hour, and when Zoe said she was going to cook her dinner and would he stay and have it with her, he agreed.

She was interesting to talk to. She was a music therapist, and she talked about her work and played records. When they had finished their meal, a simple but excellent one, she reverted to her own private life and told him something of her relationship with Stephen. But she spoke without self-pity. And she could listen as well as talk.

It meant something to him to be able to confide in a mature well-balanced woman who heard him out without interruption while he spoke of himself and Lisa—how they were going to be married when she was 18 and when she would inherit half of her dead father's fortune. Not, he said, that the money had really anything to do with it. He'd have preferred her to be penniless. All he wanted was to get her away from that unhealthy atmos-

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phere of dabbling wiith the occult, from that cloistral home where she was sheltered yet corrupted.

"What is she afraid of?" asked Zoe when he told her about the wood-touching and the indispensable amulet.

He shrugged. "Of fate? Of some avenging fury that will resent her happiness?"

"Or of loss," said Zoe. "She lost her father. Perhaps she's afraid of losing you."

"That's the last thing she need be afraid of," he said.

It was midnight before he left. The next day he meant to tell Lisa where he had been. There were no secrets between them. But Lisa was nervous and uneasy—she and Mrs. Cleasant had been to a spiritualist meeting—and he thought it unwise to raise once more a subject that was better forgotten. So he said nothing. After all, he would never see Zoe again.

But a month or so later, a month in which he and Lisa had been happy and tranquil together, he met the older girl by chance in the Portobello Road. While they talked, it occurred to him that he had eaten a meal in her flat and that he owed her dinner. He and Lisa would take her out to dinner.

In her present mood Lisa would like that, and it would be good for her to see, after the lapse of time, how her superstitiousness had led her into error. He put the invitation to Zoe, who hesitated, then accepted when he explained it would be a threesome. Dinner, then, in a fortnight's time, and he and Lisa would call for her.

"I met that girl Zoe and asked her to have dinner with us. All right with you?"

The frightened-child look came back into Lisa's face.

"Oh, no, Peter! I thought you understood. I don't ever want to see her again."

"But why not? You've seen the photograph, you've seen how silly those ideas of yours were. And Stephen won't be there. I know you didn't like him and neither did I. But they're not together any more. He's left her."

She shivered. "Let's not get to know her, Peter."

"I've invited her," he said. "I can't go back on that now."

When the evening came, Zoe appeared at her door in a long gown, her hair dressed on top of her head. She looked majestic, mysteriously changed.

"Where's Lisa?" she asked.

"She couldn't come. She and her mother are going on holiday to

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Greece at the end of the week and she's busy packing."

Part of this was true. He said it confidently, as if it were wholly true. He couldn't take his eyes off the new transformed Zoe, and he was glad he had reserved a table in an exclusive restaurant.

In the soft lamplight her youth came back to her. And for the first time he was aware of the likeness between her and Lisa. The older and the younger sister, by a trickery of light and cosmetics and maybe of his own wistful imagination, had come together in years and become twins.

It might have been his Lisa who spoke to him across the table, across the silver and glass and the single rose in a vase, but a Lisa whom life and experience had matured. Never could Lisa have talked like this—of books and music and travel—or listened to him so responsively or advised with such wisdom. He was sorry when the evening came to an end and he left her at her door.

Lisa seemed to have forgotten his engagement to dine with Zoe. She didn't mention it, so he didn't either. On the following morning she was to leave with her mother for the month's holiday the doctor had recommended for Mrs. Cleasant's health.

"I wish I wasn't going," she said to Peter. "You don't know how much I'll miss you."

"Won't I miss you?"

"Take care of yourself. I'll worry in case anything happens to you. You mustn't laugh, but when my father was alive and went away from us, I used to listen to the news four or five times a day in case there was a plane crash or a train wreck."

"You're the one that's going away, Lisa."

"It comes to the same thing." She put up her hand to the charm she wore. "I've got this, but you—would you take my four-leaf clover if I gave it to you?"

"I thought you'd given up all that nonsense," he said, and his disappointment in her almost spoiled their farewells. She kissed him goodbye with a kind of passionate sadness.

"Write to me," she said. "I'll write to you every day."

Her letters started coming at the end of the first week. They were the first he had ever had from her and they were like school essays written by a geography student, with love messages for the class teacher inserted here and there. They left him unsatisfied, a little peevish. He was lonely without her, but afraid of the image of her he carried with him.

He needed to talk it over and after a few days of indecision he

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telephoned Zoe. Ten minutes later he was in her flat, drinking her coffee and listening to her music. To be with her was a greater comfort than he had thought possible, for in the turn of her head, in the certain way she had of smiling, in the way her hair grew from a widow's peak on her forehead, he caught glimpses of Lisa.

And yet on that occasion he said nothing of his fears but, "I can't understand why I thought you and Lisa weren't alike."

"I didn't see it."

"It's almost overpowering. It's uncanny."

She smiled. "If it helps you to come and see me to get through the time while she's away, that's all right with me, Peter. I can understand that I remind you of her and that it makes things easier for you."

"It isn't only that," he said. "You mustn't think it's only that."

She said no more. It wasn't her way to probe, to hold inquisitions, or to set an egotistical value on herself. But the next time they were together he explained without being asked, and his explanation was appalling to him, the words more powerful and revealing than the thoughts from which they had sprung.

"It isn't true you remind me of Lisa. That's not it. It's that I see in you what she *might* become, only she never will."

"Who would want to be like me?"

"Everyone. Every young girl. Because you're what a woman should be, Zoe, clever and sane and kind and self-reliant and—beautiful."

"And if that's true," she said lightly, "though I disagree, why shouldn't Lisa become like that?"

"Because when she's eighteen she'll be rich, an heiress. She'll never have to work for her living or have to struggle or learn. We'll live in a house near her mother and she'll get more and more like her mother, vain and neurotic, living on sleeping pills, spending all her time with spiritualists and getting involved in sick cults. When I look at you I don't see Lisa's double. I see *her*, an alternative she, if you like, thirteen years ahead in time if another path had been marked out for her in life. And at the same time I see you as you'd be if you'd led the sort of life she must and will lead."

"You can help her not to lead that life if you love her," said Zoe.

And then Lisa's letters stopped coming. A week went by without a letter. He had resolved, because of what was happening to

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him, not to see Zoe again. But she lived so near and he thought of her so often that he was unable to resist.

He went to her and told a lie that he had convinced himself was the truth. Lisa was too young to have a firm and faithful love for anyone. Her letters had grown cold and finally had ceased to come.

Zoe listened to him, to his urgent persuasion, his comparison of his forsaken state with her own, and when he kissed her she responded at first with doubt, then with an ardor born of her own loneliness. They made love. When, later, he asked her if he might stay the night, she said he could.

After that he spent every night with her. He hardly went home. When he did he found ten letters waiting for him on the doormat. Lisa and her mother had gone on to some Aegean island—the home of a mystic Mrs. Cleasant longed to meet—where the mail was uncertain. He read the childish letters, the "darling Peter, I miss you, I'll never go away again," with impatience and guilt—and then he went back to Zoe.

Why did he have to mention those letters to her? He wished he hadn't. It was for her wisdom and her honesty that he had wanted her, and now those very qualities were striking back at him.

"When is she coming home?"

"Next Saturday," he said.

"Peter, I don't know what you mean to do—leave me and marry her or leave her and stay with me. And you must tell her about us, whatever you decide."

"I can't do that!"

"You must. Either way, you must. And if you mean to stay with me, what alternative have you?"

Stay with them both until he was sure, until he knew for certain. "You know I can't be without you, Zoe. But I can't tell her, not yet. She's such a child."

"You're going to marry that child. You love her."

"Do I?" he said. "I thought I did."

"I won't be a party to deceiving her, Peter. You must understand that. If you won't promise to tell her, I can't see you again."

Perhaps when he saw Lisa . . .

He went across the park to her mother's house on the Sunday evening. The medium was there and another woman who looked like a participant in a Black Mass, earnestly listening to Mrs.

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Cleasant's account of the mystic on the Aegean island and his investigations into the mysteries of the Great Pyramid. Lisa rushed into his arms, actually crying with happiness.

"This child has dreamed about you every night, Peter," said Mrs. Cleasant with one of her weird faraway looks. "Such dreams she has had! Of course she's psychic like me. When we knew the posts were delayed I wanted her to get a message through to you by the Power of Thought, but she was unwilling."

"I knew you wouldn't like it," said Lisa. She stayed in his arms. Of course he couldn't tell her. In time, maybe, if he got their wedding postponed and let things cool down and—but it was out of the question to tell her now.

He told Zoe he had. In order to see her again he had to do that.

"How did she take it?"

"Oh, quite well," he lied. "A lot of men have been paying her attention on holiday. I think she's beginning to realize I'm not the only man in the world."

"And she accepts—us?"

Why did she have to persist? Why make it so painful for him? He spoke boldly but with an inner self-disgust.

"I daresay she sees it as a key to her own freedom."

Zoe was convinced. The habitual truth-teller is reluctant to suspect falsehood in others. "Of course I've only met her once, and then only for a few minutes. But I wonder if you weren't deceiving yourself, Peter, when you said she loved you so much. You aren't going to see her again?"

He said he wasn't. He said it was all over, they had parted. But the enormity of what he had done appalled him. And when next he was with Lisa he found himself telling her all over again, and meaning it, how much he loved her and longed to take her away. Was he going to sacrifice that childish passionate love for a woman five years older than himself? The two were, in so many ways, alike. Suppose, in time to come, he grew tired of the one and regretted the other?

Yet, that night, he went back to Zoe.

With a skillful but frightening intrigue he divided his time between the two of them. It wasn't too difficult. Social—and occult—demands were always being made on Lisa. Zoe believed him when he said he had been kept late at work.

Autumn came, and it was still going on, this double life. His need for, his dependence on Zoe intensified and he had begun to

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resent every moment he spent away from her. But Lisa and her mother had fixed the wedding date and with fatality he accepted its inexorable approach.

On an afternoon in October he was to meet Zoe in Holland Park, by the northern gate. Lisa was going for a fitting of her wedding dress and afterward she was to dine with her mother in what he called the medium's lair. So that was all right. He waited by the gate for nearly an hour.

When Zoe didn't come, he went to her flat but received no answer to his ring. From his own home he telephoned her five times during the evening, but each time the bell rang in emptiness. He passed a sleepless night, the first night he had been on his own for four months.

All the next day, from work, he kept trying to call her, and for the first time since he had known her he made no call to Lisa. But his own phone was ringing when he got home at six. Of course it was Zoe, it must be. He took up the receiver and heard the frightened voice of Mrs. Cleasant.

"Peter?"

Disappointment hurt him like pain. "Yes," he said. "How are you? How's Lisa?"

"Peter, I have very bad news. I think you had better come here. Yes, now. At once."

"What is it? Has anything happened to Lisa?"

"Lisa has—passed over. Last night she took an overdose of my pills. I found her dead this morning."

He went out again at once. In the park, at dusk, the leaves were dying, some already fallen. At this spot, when the leaves had been showing their first green of spring, he had taken the photograph; at this spot he had seated her in a sunny open space and she had first seen Zoe.

Mrs. Cleasant wasn't alone. Some of the members of her magic circle were with her, but she was calmer than he had ever seen her and he guessed she was drugged.

"How did it happen?" he said.

"I told you. She took an overdose."

"But—why?" He shrank away from the medium's eyes which, staring, seemed to see ghosts behind him.

"Nothing to do with you, Peter," said Mrs. Cleasant. "She loved you, you know that. And she was so happy yesterday. Her fitting was canceled. She said she wanted some fresh air because it was

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such a lovely day, and then she'd walk over to see you. She'd thrown away her charm—that amulet she wore—because she said you didn't like it. I told her not to—it was a harmless thing and might do good. Who knows? If she had been wearing it—"

"Ah, if she had been under the Protection!" said the medium.

Mrs. Cleasant went on, "We were going out to dinner. I waited and waited for her. When she didn't come I went out alone. I thought she was with you, safe with you. But I came back early and there she was, looking so tired and afraid. She said she was going to bed. I asked her if there was anything wrong and she said—"

Mrs. Cleasant's voice quavered into sobs and the witch women fluttered about her, touching her and murmuring.

It was the medium who explained in her corpse voice. "She said she had seen her own double in the park."

"But that was six months ago," he burst out. "That was in April!"

"No, she saw her own double yesterday afternoon, her image walking in the park. And she dared to speak to it. She told me her double spoke of love and of her lover."

He ran away from them then, out of the house. He hailed a taxi and in a shaking whisper asked the driver to take him to where Zoe lived. All the lights were on in her windows. He rang the bell, rang it again and again.

Then, while the lights still blazed but she didn't come down, he hammered on the door with his fists, calling her name. When he knew she wasn't going to come down, that he had lost her, her double and her, he sank down on the doorstep and wept.

The taxi driver, returning along the street in search of a fare, supposed him to be drunk, and learning his address from the broken mutterings, took him home.

He never saw Zoe again.

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 435th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a chilling memoir . . .

The author, M. A. Lyon, sold a few nonfiction articles about ten years ago, then "started concentrating on poetry." She has been Chancellor of World Poetry Society Intercontinental, and American and Pancontinental editor of "Poet," a monthly published in Madras, India. Her poems have appeared in many countries, including the United States, England, Japan, and Italy.

Ms. Lyon has an Honorary Litt.D., has taught poetry at Phoenix College, and she is co-editor of "Roadrunner," a volume of haiku about the Southwestern desert. Her hobbies are gourmet cooking, bridge, and travel.

Not surprisingly, her brief memoir has a poetic quality . . .

AMERICAN GOTHIC

by M. A. LYON

Before the days of four-lane highways and people driving bumper-to-bumper, I roamed the dusty country roads across America. Bouncing along in my old Model-T roadster, I'd fling one leg over the left door, set the gas throttle on the steering wheel at thirty, and whistle my way across the open spaces of the West.

Some days I just smelled the good fresh air, rolled over the almost empty homestead acreage, and breathed the grandeur of the Rockies. And now and then an adventure would suddenly come over the horizon. I did not seek it, just enjoyed whatever unusual event came my way.

One clear sunny August day in eastern Colorado I watched the needle on my gas gauge slide dangerously close to the Empty mark. I thought, it's going to be a long, long, hot walk. I hoped the gauge was wrong.

Then silhouetted against the mountain on my left I saw a

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scantling shack about a half mile down the road. Pulling up beside the dusty gas pump that stood in front of it, I tooted my horn and waited. Nothing moved, not even the dust in the barren yard. There was stillness there beyond emptiness.

A chill slid slowly up my spine and prickled my scalp.

Out back a short distance from the house I saw a shed, so I got out and headed toward it. I was apprehensive, but I was desperate for gas. When I was about a dozen feet away a big rough-looking man, with three days' gray stubble on his chin, came out and walked toward me. He moved slowly, with deliberation, one foot set solidly in front of the other, and he had a hard mean look.

Under the bright sun the fresh blood that freckled his big square hands and spotted his blue overalls showed red and wet.

"Got any gas?" I said, trying to pretend I wasn't startled and nervous. This was not the kind of adventure I enjoyed. I could not avoid staring at those strong splotched hands, the fingers clenching and unclenching.

"Been killin' some chickens," he said flatly. "Ain't got no gas." His cold gray eyes looked straight into mine and plainly said: Get goin'—now!

My legs wanted to run, but I forced them to walk without undue haste back to my car. Then I took his advice and got out fast.

That scene is as clear to me today as it was forty years ago. I have never forgotten it. You know, there wasn't one feather in that deathly still yard.

"Q"

NEXT MONTH . . .

11 *NEW* stories — including

EDWARD D. HOCH *(about Dr. Sam Hawthorne)*

JOE GORES *(about Dan Kearny Associates)*

LAWRENCE TREAT *(about a moment of truth)*

DANA LYON *(about "the living end")*

and an Honor Roll reprint by

ROSS MACDONALD *(about Lew Archer)*

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a NEW short story by

ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

"You know, Harry," Bell said, "for a few minutes there I was afraid you were going to let your humanitarian instincts get the better of you. You're going to have to watch that."

SITE UNSEEN

by ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

The small red-headed girl behind the secretary's desk shook her head sadly. "You've been here three times already today, Harvey," she said. "Why don't you face it? Mr. Bell just doesn't want to see you."

"Why don't you face it, Marcie?" I said. "I'm going to keep trying until he does."

Marcie sighed. "You will, too, won't you?"

I nodded.

"All right," she said. "Have it your way." She got up and went back through the door to Bell's private office. A few moments later she was back. "You've got fifteen minutes," she said. "No more. And don't blame me if you come out holding your head under your arm."

"I won't," I said and went on past her into Bell's office, closing the door behind me.

Bell didn't bother to rise. He was a big man, overweight to the point of grossness and as usual wearing a rumpled blue suit that hadn't been in style even when it was new. In his youth, I was told, he had cut quite a different figure. But now with at least one finger in every pie in town and making money from all of them, appearance was something he could afford to ignore.

"What's so important this time, Harvey?" he said. "Another riverfront festival?"

I smiled wryly. The riverfront festival had been one of my first projects after taking over as director and sole paid employee of

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the Greater Tyler Chamber of Commerce. The festival had been considerably less than a resounding success.

"No," I said. "Something a little better than that." I took the letter from my coat pocket and passed it over to him.

He frowned thoughtfully at the lettering on the envelope. "Haythorn Electronics," he said. "Where have I seen that before?"

"Probably in *The Wall Street Journal*," I said. "There was an article a couple of months ago about Haythorn and its plans for expanding into the Midwest."

"So there was," Bell said. He unfolded the letter and read. "Well," he said, "so they're interested in Tyler, are they? Even going to send a man out to scout the area. That ought to make the Mayor and City Council happy."

"More than the Mayor and City Council," I said. "Right after I got that letter I called this man Congreve who's coming out here to look for the kind of property they need. And there aren't too many places in the county that meet their specifications. It wouldn't be difficult at all for a smart operator to buy up options on them, then sit back and wait for the price to skyrocket when the news got out."

Bell leaned back in his chair and looked at me thoughtfully. "So why don't you do just that, Harvey?"

I gave him another wry smile. "I would," I said, "but even options cost money, and money's the one thing I don't have."

"Oh? I thought I heard that some rich uncle of yours died up near Indianapolis, leaving you his only heir."

"He did," I said. "The trouble is he was rich only on paper. The funeral expenses plus some other debts wiped out all the cash."

"Too bad," Bell said. "That's the way it goes sometimes." He looked back down at the letter. "Who else knows about this?" he asked.

"Nobody," I said, "and nobody will until the City Council meeting next Wednesday, which gives us plenty of time—"

"*Us*? I don't recall agreeing to go in on this."

"No," I said, "but you will."

Bell smiled faintly. "Yes, I imagine I will. However, whether you like it or not, there are still a couple of things wrong with your plan. In the first place, it wouldn't look good for one person to be holding *all* the options. Show most people two and two plainly enough and they can't help but come up with four. And second, only one of those pieces of property can be picked. Spend-

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ing money on options on the others only cuts down the profit." His eyes came up to meet mine solemnly. "A better way is to come to an understanding with the company first."

"You mean a bribe?"

Bell shrugged. "If necessary, yes. But a company moving into a new area needs all kinds of things—zoning changes, access roads, sewers. And all other things being equal, this man Congreve might very well be willing to go along with us just to be sure we went along with him later. After all, I doubt the Council would go against my recommendations." He smiled again. "Not when at least half of them are paying on mortgages I hold."

I smiled, too. "I'm beginning to understand how you got where you are," I said.

"That's the first step to getting there yourself," Bell said. "Now, the thing to do is set up a private meeting with this Congreve when he gets here. Think you can do that?"

"I don't see why not," I said.

"Good," Bell said. He rose and came around his desk to walk with me into the outer office. "Marcie," he said genially to his secretary, "what's this I hear about you telling Harvey I didn't want to see him? You know I'm always in to my friends." And with that he gave me one last hearty clap on the shoulder and went back into his office.

The girl shook her head wonderingly. "I give up," she said.

"Oh," I said, "never do that. Not giving up is the whole secret."

It was the better part of two weeks before Congreve showed up in Tyler for the regular bi-weekly meeting of the City Council. The Tuesday evening before, Bell and I went out to meet him at his motel. I drove because my car was less conspicuous than Bell's and, as he said, it was supposed to be a private meeting.

Car or no car, Bell's bulk would have made him instantly recognizable if anyone had been there to see us. But, fortunately, nobody was and right on schedule I rapped lightly on Congreve's door.

And got no response.

Bell frowned at me. "I thought you had this all arranged," he said.

"I did," I said. "As a matter of fact, I talked to him again this afternoon and there was no problem then." I rapped a second time, more loudly than before. There was still no response, but

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the door shifted slightly, as if it weren't quite on the latch, and after another moment I gave it a harder push. It swung open to reveal Congreve in his shirt sleeves sprawled out on the floor.

Bell gasped and started instinctively to draw back. I blocked him, but only for a moment. Then I pushed past him into the room to kneel beside the fallen man. "Thank God," I said. "He's still alive."

At my voice Congreve raised his head slightly. He seemed to be trying to roll over and as gently as I could I helped ease him onto his back. When the maneuver was completed, he lay heavily against me and made small, futile, grasping motions in the direction of the bed table. His mouth worked and after a moment I caught the one word: "Medicine."

I swiveled back to Bell, motionless in the doorway. "For God's sakes, don't just stand there! Get the man his medicine."

If Bell ever thought about it later, I'd pay for that peremptory tone. But now he just reacted. Moving surprisingly quickly for a man of his bulk, he snatched the small vial from among Congreve's other possessions on the bed table, then came back with it and a glass of water from the bathroom to the stricken man's side.

By now I had managed to get him up into a semi-sitting position and taking a pill that Bell shook out I forced it into his mouth, then held the glass to his lips. He drank greedily until I pulled it away; then he dropped back heavily against me again.

I looked up at Bell. "We'd better get an ambulance," I said. "And a doctor. Fast."

Alarm showed on Bell's face. He was beginning to think again. "My God," he said. "They can't find me here."

"No." It was Congreve. His voice was weak and his face still had a pale, faintly waxy cast, but his eyes were open and focused and he was breathing more easily now. "No," he said again. "I'm all right. Just get me up."

Bell moved swiftly again, as if to prevent the other man from changing his mind, and between us we got Congreve onto his feet and over to the bed where he sat pale and slump-shouldered.

"You sure you don't want a doctor?" I said.

Congreve nodded. "This has happened before," he said. "Angina. The medicine takes care of it." As if to prove his point he took a couple of deep breaths, then sat up straighter and even managed a smile of sorts. "God knows what would have happened if you hadn't come in when you did."

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The small vial lay where Bell had dropped it. I picked it up now and turned it over in my hand. The label read: *Kumidin. Take As Directed.* With a slight grimace I handed it back to Congreve. "Next time you may not be so lucky," I said. "It's none of my business, but if you're smart you'll let somebody else do the traveling around alone in the future."

Congreve's smile turned wry. "There are plenty who'd love to," he said, "believe me. Well, two more years and I'll have my pension. Then I can afford to be smart. Until then I'll do what I have to—just like everybody else."

I shrugged. "It's your funeral," I said.

Bell cleared his throat. "You might remember," he said, "we did come here for a purpose."

"This is hardly the time—" I began.

"It's all right," Congreve said. "Really. I'm fine now." He turned to Bell. "It's easy to guess why you're here," he said. "You have some land you want me to pick for the factory site." He shook his head. "I'm sorry. I really wish I could accommodate you."

Bell regarded him impassively. "Considering we just saved your life," he said, "it would seem you could see your way clear to doing more than just wish."

The smile twisted Congreve's mouth again. "Believe me, if I could, I would," he said. "Unfortunately, the simple fact is Haythorn Electronics has no intention of buying land anywhere near Tyler—and never did."

"But your letter—" I said.

"Was a fraud."

Bell leaned forward. His eyes glittered dangerously. "You mean you don't represent Haythorn?" he said.

"Oh, I'm from Haythorn all right," Congreve said. "And Haythorn *is* expanding. But somewhere else. All the activity here was simply a smokescreen—to distract attention while we moved in quietly to pick up the land we really want."

"At a song," I said.

Congreve shrugged. "Well," he said, "let's say more reasonably than if we'd made a straight-out offer. You know how greedy people can get when they know a big company's got its eye on their property. I'll have to ask you to treat this as confidential, of course. Normally I wouldn't be telling you at all, but I do owe you something for saving my life."

"Of course," I said bitterly.

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Bell looked thoughtful. "Has anything been done about buying that other land yet?"

"No," Congreve said. "We were waiting until attention was firmly focused on Tyler."

"Well, then, maybe you could still persuade Haythorn to change its mind."

Congreve smiled again and shook his head. "I'm afraid not," he said. "There's too much involved for any change in plan now."

"In that case," Bell said, looking down as if to study the backs of his hands, "I guess you'd better just tell us where this other piece of property is located."

Congreve looked at him blankly for a moment, then smiled a tight rueful smile. "So you can buy it first and jack up the price?" he said. He shook his head. "I'm sorry," he said. "I owe you a lot for coming in when you did. But it would be as much as my job's worth for me to give you that information."

Bell nodded gravely. "So it would," he said, "if it got out. Of course, Harvey and I wouldn't tell. And," he added carefully, "we wouldn't be under compulsion then to tell what you've already told us either—or don't you think that's as much as your job's worth, too?"

Congreve looked his astonishment. "But I told you that in confidence," he said.

"Did you?" Bell smiled cynically. "Maybe next time you'd better get my agreement first."

I looked away as Congreve turned to me. "Better tell him," I said. "He'll do what he says."

"And you'll back him up too, won't you?" Congreve said grimly. He turned back to Bell who once again met his gaze evenly. Finally Congreve sighed. "It's in Brown County," he said. "I'll need a plat map to give you the exact location."

"Harvey has one in his office," Bell said, his mood expansive again now that he'd got his way. "He'll expect you tomorrow—early." He moved over to the door then, beckoning me to follow. "I'd suggest, though," he went on to Congreve, "that otherwise you carry on as if this had never happened." He chuckled deep in his throat. "Who knows? Play your cards right and you may collect that pension yet."

Congreve slammed the door behind us.

Bell chuckled. "You know, Harvey," Bell said, "for a few minutes there I was afraid you were going to let your humanitarian

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instincts get the better of you. You're going to have to watch that."

"I'll remember that," I said.

Afterward I dropped him at his house with a promise to call back as soon as Congreve made contact with me the next morning. Then I did a quick circuit of the block and drove back to the motel.

Congreve was sitting on the bed again, a glass in his hand. The vial of medicine was missing from the bed table and in its place stood a bottle of bourbon. I went in without knocking.

"I thought I told you to check with a doctor first," I said.

Congreve looked up, surprised. "Why?" he said. "I thought I was very convincing."

"So you were," I said. "All but the Kumidin. It's a heart medicine all right. But it's an anti-coagulant. It has nothing to do with the relief of angina attacks."

"Oh," Congreve said. He shrugged. "Apparently your friend Mr. Bell doesn't know that, though. Because he bit and we'll sell him that worthless farm you inherited from your uncle just like I said we would." He grinned suddenly and raised his glass in a mock toast. "What are you going to do with all that money, Harvey?"

I smiled, just thinking about it. Only one thing kept it from being perfect. I wouldn't be around to see Bell's face when he discovered Haythorn wasn't expanding into Brown County either.

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Bringle, Mary	THE FOOTPATH MURDER	Doubleday	$5.95	11/7
Burns, Rex	THE ALVAREZ JOURNAL	Harper & Row	6.95	11/5
Lovell, Marc	DREAMERS IN A HAUNTED HOUSE	Doubleday	5.95	11/21
Lovesy, Peter	A CASE OF SPIRITS	Dodd, Mead	5.95	11/3
Wyllie, John	THE BUTTERFLY FLOOD	Doubleday	5.95	11/28

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

Brown, Carter	DONOVAN'S DAY (Y6716)	Signet-NAL	$1.25	10/15
Himes, Chester	ALL SHOT UP (Y6717)	Signet-NAL	1.25	10/15
Lewis, L. M.	FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND OF TIME (W6722)	Signet-NAL	1.50	10/15
Queen, Ellery	THE MADMAN THEORY (Y6715)	Signet-NAL	1.25	10/15

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a NEW Library Fuzz story by

JAMES HOLDING

Is it possible for a detective to solve a mystery without knowing the solution? Is it possible for a detective to bring a case to a successful conclusion without really knowing what it's all about? You don't think so? Well, try this latest Hal Johnson investigation for size—Hal Johnson, the library cop, the book bloodhound, the overdue avenger . . .

STILL A COP

by JAMES HOLDING

Lieutenant Randall telephoned me on Tuesday, catching me in my cell-sized office at the public library just after I'd finished lunch.

"Hal?" he said. "How come you're not out playing patty-cake with the book borrowers?" Randall still resents my leaving the police department to become a library detective—what he calls a "sissy cop." Nowadays my assignments involve nothing more dangerous than tracing stolen and overdue books for the public library.

I said, "Even a library cop has to eat, Lieutenant. What's on your mind?"

"Same old thing. Murder."

"I haven't killed anyone for over a week," I said.

His voice took on a definite chill. "Somebody killed a young fellow we took out of the river this morning. Shot him through the head. And tortured him beforehand."

"Sorry," I said. I'd forgotten how grim it was to be a Homicide cop. "Tortured, did you say?"

"Yeah. Cigar burns all over him. I need information, Hal."

"About what?"

"You ever hear of *The Damion Complex*?"

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"Sure. It's the title of a spy novel published last year."

"I thought it might be a book." There was satisfaction in Randall's voice now. "Next question: you have that book in the public library?"

"Of course. Couple of copies, probably."

"Do they have different numbers or something to tell them apart?"

"Yes, they do. Why?"

"Find out for me if one of your library copies of *The Damion Complex* has this number on it, will you?" He paused and I could hear paper rustling. "ES4187."

"Right," I said. "I'll get back to you in ten minutes." Then, struck by something familiar about the number, I said, "No, wait, hold it a minute, Lieutenant."

I pulled out of my desk drawer the list of overdue library books I'd received the previous morning and checked it hurriedly. "Bingo," I said into the phone, "I picked up that book with that very number yesterday morning. How about that? Do you want it?"

"I want it."

"For what?"

"Evidence, maybe."

"In your torture-murder case?"

He lost patience. "Look, just get hold of the book for me, Hal. I'll tell you about it when I pick it up, okay?"

"Okay, Lieutenant. When?"

"Ten minutes." He sounded eager.

I hung up and called Ellen on the checkout desk. "Listen, sweetheart," I said to her because it makes her mad to be called sweetheart and she's extremely attractive when she's mad, "can you find me *The Damion Complex*, copy number ES4187? I brought it in yesterday among the overdues."

"*The Damion Complex*?" She took down the number. "I'll call you back, Hal." She didn't sound a bit mad. Maybe she was softening up at last. I'd asked her to marry me 17 times in the last six months, but she was still making up her mind.

In two minutes she called me back. "It's out again," she reported. "It went out on card number 3888 yesterday after you brought it in."

Lieutenant Randall was going to love that. "Who is card number 3888?"

"A Miss Oradell Murphy."

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"Address?"

She gave it to me, an apartment on Leigh Street.

"Telephone number?"

"I thought you might be able to look that up yourself." She was tart. "I'm busy out here."

"Thank you, sweetheart," I said. "Will you marry me?"

"Not now. I told you I'm busy." She hung up. But she did it more gently than usual, it seemed to me. She *was* softening up. My spirits lifted.

Lieutenant Randall arrived in less than the promised ten minutes. "Where is it?" he asked, fixing me with his cat stare. He seemed too big to fit into my office. "You got it for me?"

I shook my head. "It went out again yesterday. Sorry."

He grunted in disappointment, took a look at my spindly visitor's chair, and decided to remain standing. "Who borrowed it?"

I told him Miss Oradell Murphy, Apartment 3A at the Harrington Arms on Leigh Street.

"Thanks." He tipped a hand and turned to leave.

"Wait a minute. Where you going, Lieutenant?"

"To get the book."

"Those apartments at Harrington Arms are efficiencies," I said. "Mostly occupied by single working women. So maybe Miss Murphy won't be home right now. Why not call first?"

He nodded. I picked up my phone and gave our switchboard girl Miss Murphy's telephone number. Randall fidgeted nervously.

"No answer," the switchboard reported.

I grinned at Randall. "See? Nobody home."

"I need that book." Randall sank into the spindly visitor's chair and sighed in frustration.

"You were going to tell me why."

"Here's why." He fished a damp crumpled bit of paper out of an envelope he took from his pocket. I reached for it. He held it away. "Don't touch it," he said. "We found it on the kid we pulled from the river this morning. It's the only damn thing we *did* find on him. No wallet, no money, no identification, no clothing labels, no nothing. Except for this he was plucked as clean as a chicken. We figure it was overlooked. It was in the bottom of his shirt pocket."

"What's it say?" I could see water-smeared writing.

He grinned unexpectedly, although his yellow eyes didn't seem to realize that the rest of his face was smiling. "It says: *PL Damion Complex ES4187.*"

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"That's all?"

"That's all."

"Great bit of deduction, Lieutenant," I said. "You figured the *PL* for Public Library?"

"All by myself."

"So what's it mean?"

"How do I know till I get the damn book?" He sat erect and went on briskly, "Who had the book before Miss Murphy?"

I consulted my overdue list from the day before. "Gregory Hazzard. Desk clerk at the Starlight Motel on City Line. I picked up seven books and fines from him yesterday."

The Lieutenant was silent for a moment. Then, "Give Miss Murphy another try, will you?"

She still didn't answer her phone.

Randall stood up. My chair creaked when he removed his weight. "Let's go see this guy Hazzard."

"Me, too?"

"You, too." He gave me the fleeting grin again. "You're mixed up in this, son."

"I don't see how."

"Your library owns the book. And you belong to the library. So move your tail."

Gregory Hazzard was surprised to see me again so soon. He was a middle-aged skeleton, with a couple of pounds of skin and gristle fitted over his bones so tightly that he looked like the object of an anatomy lesson. His clothes hung on him—snappy men's wear on a scarecrow. "You got all my overdue books yesterday," he greeted me.

"I know, Mr. Hazzard. But my friend here wants to ask you about one of them."

"Who's your friend?" He squinted at Randall.

"Lieutenant Randall, City Police."

Hazzard blinked. "Another cop? We went all through that with the boys from your robbery detail day before yesterday."

Randall's eyes flickered. Otherwise he didn't change expression. "I'm not here about that. I'm interested in one of your library books."

"Which one?"

"*The Damion Complex.*"

Hazzard bobbed his skull on his pipestem neck. "That one. Just a so-so yarn. You can find better spy stories in your newspaper."

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Randall ignored that. "You live here in the motel, Mr. Hazzard?"

"No. With my sister down the street a ways, in a duplex."

"This is your address on the library records," I broke in. "The Starlight Motel."

"Sure. Because this is where I read all the books I borrow. And where I work."

"Don't you ever take library books home?" Randall asked.

"No. I leave 'em here, right at this end of the desk, out of the way. I read 'em during slack times, you know? When I finish them I take 'em back to the library and get another batch. I'm a fast reader."

"But your library books were overdue. If you're such a fast reader, how come?"

"He was sick for three weeks," I told Randall. "Only got back to work Saturday."

The Lieutenant's lips tightened and I knew from old experience that he wanted me to shut up. "That right?" he asked Hazzard. "You were sick?"

"As a dog. Thought I was dying. So'd my sister. That's why my books were overdue."

"They were here on the desk all the time you were sick?"

"Right. Cost me a pretty penny in fines, too, I must say. Hey, Mr. Johnson?"

I laughed. "Big deal. Two ninety-four, wasn't it?"

He chuckled so hard I thought I could hear his bones rattle. "Cheapest pleasure we got left, free books from the public library." He sobered suddenly. "What's so important about *The Damion Complex*, Lieutenant?"

"Wish I knew." Randall signaled me with his eyes. "Thanks, Mr. Hazzard, you've been helpful. We'll be in touch." He led the way out to the police car.

On the way back to town he turned aside ten blocks and drove to the Harrington Arms Apartments on Leigh Street. "Maybe we'll get lucky," he said as he pulled up at the curb. "If Murphy's home, get the book from her, Hal, okay? No need to mention the police."

A comely young lady, half out of a nurse's white uniform and evidently just home from work, answered my ring at Apartment 3A. "Yes?" she said, hiding her dishabille by standing behind the door and peering around its edge.

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"Miss Oradell Murphy?"

"Yes." She had a fetching way of raising her eyebrows.

I showed her my ID card and gave her a cock-and-bull story about *The Damion Complex* having been issued to her yesterday by mistake. "The book should have been destroyed," I said, "because the previous borrower read it while she was ill with an infectious disease."

"Oh," Miss Murphy said. She gave me the book without further questions.

When I returned to the police car Lieutenant Randall said, "Gimme," and took the book from me, handling it with a finicky delicacy that seemed odd in such a big man. By his tightening lips I could follow his growing frustration as he examined *The Damion Complex*. For it certainly seemed to be just an ordinary copy of another ordinary book from the public library. The library name was stamped on it in the proper places. Identification number ES4187. Card pocket, with regulation date card, inside the front cover. Nothing concealed between its pages, not even a pressed forget-me-not.

"What the hell?" the Lieutenant grunted.

"Code message?" I suggested.

He was contemptuous. "Code message? You mean certain words off certain pages? In that case why was this particular copy specified—number ES4187? Any copy would do."

"Unless the message is in the book itself. In invisible ink? Or indicated by pin pricks over certain words?" I showed my teeth at him. "After all, it's a spy novel."

We went over the book carefully twice before we found the negative. And no wonder. It was very small—no more than half an inch or maybe five-eighths—and shoved deep in the pocket inside the front cover, behind the date card.

Randall held it up to the light. "Too small to make out what it is," I said. "We need a magnifying glass."

"Hell with that." Randall threw his car into gear. "I'll get Jerry to make me a blowup." Jerry is the police photographer. "I'll drop you off at the library."

"Oh, no, Lieutenant. I'm mixed up in this. You said so yourself. I'm sticking until I see what's on that negative." He grunted.

Half an hour later I was in Randall's office at headquarters when the police photographer came in and threw a black-and-white 3½" by 4½" print on the Lieutenant's desk. Randall allowed

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me to look over his shoulder as he examined it.

Its quality was poor. It was grainy from enlargement, and the images were slightly blurred, as though the camera had been moved just as the picture was snapped. But it was plain enough so that you could make out two men sitting facing each other across a desk. One was facing the camera directly; the other showed only as part of a rear-view silhouette—head, right shoulder, right arm.

The right arm, however, extended into the light on the desk top and could be seen quite clearly. It was lifting from an open briefcase on the desk a transparent bag of white powder, about the size of a pound of sugar. The briefcase contained three more similar bags. The man who was full face to the camera was reaching out a hand to accept the bag of white powder.

Lieutenant Randall said nothing for what seemed a long time. Then all he did was grunt noncommittally.

I said, "Heroin, Lieutenant?"

"Could be."

"Big delivery. Who's the guy making the buy? Do you know?"

He shrugged. "We'll find out."

"When you make him, you'll have your murderer. Isn't that what you're thinking?"

He shrugged again. "How do you read it, Hal?"

"Easy. The kid you pulled from the river got this picture somehow, decided to cut himself in by a little blackmail, and got killed for his pains."

"And tortured. Why tortured?" Randall was just using me as a sounding board.

"To force him to tell where the negative was hidden? He wouldn't have taken the negative with him when he braced the dope peddler."

"Hell of a funny place to hide a negative," Randall said. "You got any ideas about that?"

I went around Randall's desk and sat down. "I can guess. The kid sets up his blackmail meeting with the dope peddler, starts out with both the negative and a print of it, like this one, to keep his date. At the last minute he has second thoughts about carrying the negative with him."

"Where's he starting out from?" Randall squeezed his hands together.

"The Starlight Motel. Where else?"

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"Go on."

"So maybe he decides to leave the negative in the motel safe and stops at the desk in the lobby to do so. But Hazzard is in the can, maybe. Or has stepped out to the restaurant for coffee. The kid has no time to waste. So he shoves the little negative into one of Hazzard's library books temporarily, making a quick note of the book title and library number so he can find it again. You found the note in his shirt pocket. How's that sound?"

Randall gave me his half grin and said, "So long, Hal. Thanks for helping."

I stood up. "I need a ride to the library. You've wasted my whole afternoon. You going to keep my library book?"

"For a while. But I'll be in touch."

"You'd better be. Unless you want to pay a big overdue fine."

It was the following evening before I heard any more from Lieutenant Randall. He telephoned me at home. "Catch any big bad book thieves today, Hal?" he began in a friendly voice.

"No. You catch any murderers?"

"Not yet. But I'm working on it."

I laughed. "You're calling to report progress, is that it?"

"That's it." He was as bland as milk.

"Proceed," I said.

"We found out who the murdered kid was."

"Who?"

"A reporter named Joel Homer from Cedar Falls. Worked for the *Cedar Falls Herald*. The editor tells me Homer was working on a special assignment the last few weeks. Trying to crack open a story on dope in the Tri-Cities."

"Oho. Then it *is* dope in the picture?"

"Reasonable to think so, anyway."

"How'd you find out about the kid? The Starlight Motel?"

"Yeah. Your friend Hazzard, the desk clerk, identified him for us. Remembered checking him into Room 18 on Saturday morning. His overnight bag was still in the room and his car in the parking lot."

"Well, it's nice to know who got killed," I said, "but you always told me you'd rather know who did the killing. Find out who the guy in the picture is?"

"He runs a ratty café on the river in Overbrook, just out of town. Name of Williams."

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"Did you tie up the robbery squeal Hazzard mentioned when we were out there yesterday?"

"Could be. One man, masked, held up the night clerk, got him to open the office safe, and cleaned it out. Nothing much in it, matter of fact—hundred bucks or so."

"Looking for that little negative, you think?"

"Possibly, yeah."

"Why don't you nail this Williams and find out?"

"On the strength of that picture?" Randall said. "Uh-uh. That was enough to put him in a killing mood, maybe, but it's certainly not enough to convict him of murder. He could be buying a pound of sugar. No, I'm going to be sure of him before I take him."

"How do you figure to make sure of him, for God's sake?"

I shouldn't have asked that, because as a result I found myself, two hours later, sitting across that same desk—the one in the snapshot—from Mr. Williams, suspected murderer. We were in a sizable back room in Williams' café in Overbrook. A window at the side of the room was open, but the cool weed-scented breeze off the river didn't keep me from sweating.

"You said on the phone you thought I might be interested in a snapshot you found," Williams said. He was partially bald. Heavy black eyebrows met over his nose. The eyes under them looked like brown agate marbles in milk. He was smoking a fat cigar.

"That's right," I said.

"Why?"

"I figured it could get you in trouble in certain quarters, that's all."

He blew smoke. "What do you mean by that?"

"It's actually a picture of you buying heroin across this desk right here. Or maybe selling it."

"Well, well," he said, "that's interesting all right. If true." He was either calm and cool or trying hard to appear so.

"It's true," I said. "You're very plain in the picture. So's the heroin." I gave him the tentative smile of a timid, frightened man. It wasn't hard to do, because I felt both timid and frightened.

"Where is this picture of yours?" Williams asked.

"Right here." I handed him the print Lieutenant Randall had given me.

He looked at it without any change of expression I could see. Finally he took another drag on his cigar. "This guy does resemble me a little. But how did *you* happen to know that?"

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I jerked a thumb over my shoulder. "I been in your café lots of times. I recognized you."

He studied the print. "You're right about one thing. This picture might be misunderstood. So maybe we can deal. What I can't understand is where you found the damn thing."

"In a book I borrowed from the public library."

"A book?" He halted his cigar in midair, startled.

"Yes. A spy novel. I dropped the book accidentally and this picture fell out of the inside card pocket." I put my hand into my jacket pocket and touched the butt of the pistol that Randall had issued me for the occasion. I needed comfort.

"You found this print in a book?"

"Not this print, no. I made it myself out of curiosity. I'm kind of an amateur photographer, see? When I found what I had, I thought maybe you might be interested, that's all. Are you?"

"How many prints did you make?"

"Just the one."

"And where's the negative?"

"I've got it, don't worry."

"With you?"

"You think I'm nuts?" I said defensively. I started a hand toward my hip pocket, then jerked it back nervously.

Mr. Williams smiled and blew cigar smoke. "What do you think might be a fair price?" he asked.

I swallowed. "Would twenty thousand dollars be too much?"

His eyes changed from brown marbles to white slits. "That's pretty steep."

"But you'll pay it?" I tried to put a touch of triumph into my expression.

"Fifteen. When you turn over the negative to me."

"Okay," I said, sighing with relief. "How long will it take you to get the money?"

"No problem. I've got it right here when you're ready to deal." His eyes went to a small safe in a corner of the room. Maybe the heroin was there, too, I thought.

"Hey!" I said. "That's great, Mr. Williams! Because I've got the negative here, too. I was only kidding before." I fitted my right hand around the gun butt in my pocket. With my left I pulled out my wallet and threw it on the desk between us.

"In here?" Williams said, opening the wallet.

"In the little pocket."

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He found the tiny negative at once.

He took a magnifying glass from his desk drawer and used it to look at the negative against the ceiling light. Then he nodded, satisfied. He raised his voice a little and said, "Okay, Otto."

Otto? I heard a door behind me scrape over the rug as it was thrust open. Turning in my chair, I saw a big man emerge from a closet and step toward me. My eyes went instantly to the gun in his hand. It was fitted with a silencer, and oddly, the man's right middle finger was curled around the trigger. Then I saw why. The tip of his right index finger was missing. The muzzle of the gun looked as big and dark as Mammoth Cave to me.

"He's all yours, Otto," Williams said. "I've got the negative. No wonder you couldn't find it in the motel safe. The crazy kid hid it in a library book."

"I heard," Otto said flatly.

I still had my hand in my pocket touching the pistol, but I realized I didn't have a chance of beating Otto to a shot, even if I shot through my pocket. I stood up very slowly and faced Otto. He stopped far enough away from me to be just out of reach.

Williams said, "No blood in here this time, Otto. Take him out back. Don't forget his wallet and labels. And it won't hurt to spoil his face a little before you put him in the river. He's local."

Otto kept his eyes on me. They were paler than his skin. He nodded. "I'll handle it."

"Right." Williams started for the door that led to his café kitchen, giving me an utterly indifferent look as he went by. "So long, smart boy," he said. He went through the door and closed it behind him.

Otto cut his eyes to the left to make sure Williams had closed the door tight. I used that split second to dive headfirst over Williams' desk, my hand still in my pocket on my gun. I lit on the floor behind the desk with a painful thump and Williams' desk chair, which I'd overturned in my plunge, came crashing down on top of me.

From the open window at the side of the room a new voice said conversationally, "Drop the gun, Otto."

Apparently Otto didn't drop it fast enough because Lieutenant Randall shot it out of his hand before climbing through the window into the room. Two uniformed cops followed him.

Later, over a pizza and beer in the Trocadero All-Night Diner,

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Randall said, "We could have taken Williams before. The Narc Squad has known for some time he's a peddler. But we didn't know who was supplying him."

I said stiffly, "I thought I was supposed to be trying to hang a murder on him. How did that Otto character get into the act?"

"After we set up your meeting with Williams, he phoned Otto to come over to his café and take care of another would-be blackmailer."

"Are you telling me you didn't think Williams was the killer?"

Randall shook his head, looking slightly sheepish. "I was pretty sure Williams wouldn't risk Murder One. Not when he had a headlock on somebody who'd do it for him."

"Like Otto?"

"Like Otto."

"Well, just who the hell *is* Otto?"

"He's the other man in the snapshot with Williams."

Something in the way he said it made me ask him, "You mean you knew who he was *before* you asked me to go through that charade tonight?"

"Sure. I recognized him in the picture."

I stopped chewing my pizza and stared at him. I was dumfounded, as they say. "Are you nuts?" I said with my mouth full. "The picture just showed part of a silhouette. From behind, at that. Unrecognizable."

"You didn't look close enough." Randall gulped beer. "His right hand showed in the picture plain. With the end of his right index finger gone."

"But how could you recognize a man from that?"

"Easy. Otto Schmidt of our Narcotics Squad is missing the end of his right index finger. Had it shot off by a junkie in a raid."

"There are maybe a hundred guys around with fingers like that. You must have had more to go on than that, Lieutenant."

"I did. The heroin."

"You recognized that, too?" I was sarcastic.

"Sure. It was the talk of the department a week ago, Hal."

"What was?"

"The heroin. Somebody stole it right out of the Narc Squad's own safe at headquarters." He laughed aloud. "Can you believe it? Two kilos, packaged in four bags, just like in the picture."

I said, "How come it wasn't in the news?"

"You know why. It would make us look like fools."

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"Anyway, one bag of heroin looks just like every other," I said, unconvinced.

"You didn't see the *big* blowup I had made of that picture," the lieutenant said. "A little tag on one of the bags came out real clear. You could read it."

All at once I felt very tired. "Don't tell me," I said.

He told me anyway, smiling. "It said: Confiscated, such and such a date, such and such a raid, by the Grandhaven Police Department. That's us, Hal. Remember?"

I sighed. "So you've turned up another crooked cop," I said. "Believe me, I'm glad I'm out of the business, Lieutenant."

"You're *not* out of it." Randall's voice roughened with some emotion I couldn't put a name to. "You're still a cop, Hal."

"I'm an employee of the Grandhaven Public Library."

"Library fuzz. But still a cop."

I shook my head.

"You helped me take a killer tonight, didn't you?"

"Yeah. Because you fed me a lot of jazz about needing somebody who didn't *smell* of cop. Somebody who knew the score but could act the part of a timid greedy citizen trying his hand at blackmail for the first time."

"Otto Schmidt's a city cop. If I'd sent another city cop in there tonight, Otto would have recognized him immediately. That's why I asked you to go."

"You could have told me the facts."

He shook his head. "Why? I thought you'd do better without knowing. And you did. The point is, though, that you *did* it. Helped me nail a killer at considerable risk to yourself. Even if the killer wasn't the one you thought. You didn't do it just for kicks, did you? Or because we found the negative in your library book, for God's sake?"

I shrugged and stood up to leave.

"So you see what I mean?" Lieutenant Randall said. "You're still a cop." He grinned at me. "I'll get the check, Hal. And thanks for the help."

I left without even saying good night. I could feel his yellow eyes on my back all the way out of the diner.

"Q"

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TO THE SMALLEST DETAIL

by MARJORIE RIDDELL

Beryl Puddenfoot made a brisk professional survey of the display on her kitchen table: crystal fruit-salad bowl; one can each of tropical fruit cocktail, sliced peaches, red cherries; fresh grapes; two apples; Grand Marnier; paring knife, kitchen knife, tablespoon. Half a lemon.

The arrangement was much too precise. From experience after her training, she knew better than this. She made some adjustments, then walked across the kitchen to see the effect from the doorway.

That was more like it. Now it was fruit salad at its inception, the main ingredients placed casually on the table and still at the first point of assembly. She wouldn't normally use apple in fruit salad, fresh or mixed, but that couldn't be helped. And the apples would pass unremarked.

Back at the table she peeled, quartered, and cored an apple. Then, very carefully, very thoroughly, she covered the surface of each quarter with juice from the lemon. She positioned the pieces with the knife at an angle, casually, but very carefully, and returned the half lemon to the refrigerator.

She moved to the window, a sash window indigenous to the Edwardian house. She reached up, released the catch, and raised the lower frame sharply and at an angle so that it stuck firmly, as it often did, a few inches above the sill.

Winter air sliced in icily as she tested the frame. It remained

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firm. She had held a love-hate relationship with this window for many years, loving its appearance and hating its refusal to cooperate. Now she gave it a little pat of approval.

She left the kitchen light on as she went into the hall, glancing at her watch. Plenty of time.

She was wearing dark slacks and a sweater, and now she put on a black silk scarf and black anorak. She checked her handbag. Yes, the letter was inside where she had put it, stamped and ready for mailing. Now the black hood of the anorak over her pale hair. And, of course, black gloves.

At the front door she glanced back. The door to the kitchen was ajar. She switched on the porch light, leaving on the hall light as she went through the doorway. She hesitated. Should she leave the front door open, or maybe closed and unlocked?

No, that would be going too far. Casualness, yes; carelessness, no.

She closed the door firmly behind her and heard the lock snap home. That left the house empty. She had lived here alone since her parents were killed in a car crash nearly twelve years ago. It was highly unlikely that anyone would call in her absence.

It was too early for the rush hour of homecoming Londoners, but she turned right to avoid the bus stop, for housewives would be returning from the afternoon's shopping at Kingston. There might even be a few late stragglers from schools, those schools where this afternoon was not the weekly half holiday it was at the girls' school in which she taught. And to be recognized now would be fatal to her plan.

She turned off the road into a lane that ran between rear gardens, walking briskly along the unpaved ground, her tall strong figure dark in the concealing darkness. The air was sharp and cold on her face and she was glad of the anorak and its hood.

Then ahead and to the right there was a sudden rustling and crackling in the near-leafless bushes, and she heard a girl's soft giggling, a boy's mumbled murmuring. She halted abruptly, stiff with alarm.

"Stop it," the girl said, with total lack of conviction. "It's too cold."

Beryl knew the voice. It was Rosina Grange's. Of course, Rosina Grange, known in the delicacy of local suburban vernacular as "an undesirable."

Beryl had long ago ceased trying to like her pupils, but Rosina

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Grange aroused positive antipathy. What else could one feel for a girl who put frog spawn in the cold consommé for the school governors' lunch? A girl who not only deliberately burned her own cooking but turned up the heat under others'? A girl who substituted cocoa for curry powder, and the other way round?

It just would be Rosina Grange, thought Beryl savagely, larking with a boy in this place, *at this time*.

"No, you mustn't—"

"Aw, come on."

If she turned back there was only one other route, which cut through a new housing development and was well lighted and more populated. No, she had to continue on her present course. She pulled the hood forward, well over her face, and walked on, at first cautiously, then quickly, her footsteps quiet on the earthen ground of the lane.

The giggling and whispering continued, did not diminish.

Then she was safely past. She had been holding her breath. Her heartbeats made deep rapid thudding as she adjusted the hood and further tucked in the scarf—and she detested Rosina Grange. She thought suddenly, as she came into the road, what remarkable good fortune she didn't have the girl for biology.

In the shadow of the wall she walked quickly to the crossing and went straight ahead along the narrow side street leading to the Common.

Miss Quayle, the biology teacher, became quite tight-lipped about Rosina Grange. In the Staff Room she had once described Rosina's inquiries about pregnancy in elephants. And, of course, Miss Bright, the junior English teacher, had giggled quite loudly before she coughed. Beryl had decided to remain silent about Rosina's most persistent questions about fish roe.

Soon, however, soon it would be over. Soon there would be no more school, no more rude ungrateful girls, no more teaching. Cooking would then be the joy it used to be and not the torture it had become.

She met no one on the Common. Keeping close to the bordering road, she cut between the trees only once to save a corner and a good ten minutes. When she emerged she was facing her objective.

The house loomed large and Victorian and in darkness. Clare would be in the drawing room upstairs at the back, overlooking the garden that money kept immaculate.

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The house was called The Laurels. When Clare Borden came here 20 years ago, as a stranger and a bride, the laurel bushes were already long vanished, and her planting of justifying bushes in the front garden had been considered rather charming. Pedantic, perhaps, and unnecessary, but charming nonetheless. And much less complicated than changing the name of the house in the title deeds. In any case, The Horse Chestnut didn't have quite the same ring.

No one had perceived in her action an honesty so basic and inflexible that it was deadly. Before long Clare had made few acquaintances, no friends, and many enemies.

This pattern continued. It is not endearing when a woman tells you honestly that your hair is grayer than when she last saw you six months ago; or that in her opinion your husband drinks too much; or that your wife is being overcharged at the beauty salon; or that if you want her advice, your daughter stays out too late—and with the wrong boys.

There wasn't even the satisfaction of debiting her with jealousy. Clare was without malice. She was just utterly, devastatingly truthful.

Everyone was sorry for Arthur, her husband. He had long ago forgotten his first delight in her unsophisticated simplicity and honesty. Love and affection, starved of attention from Clare, soon dried, and died, and now they lived apart in their house. Clare would never agree to a separation, and truthfulness is no ground yet for divorce.

So Arthur found occasional and discreet consolations elsewhere, otherwise devoting much of his spare time from the bank to committee work, golf, and bridge at his London club. This was his weekly bridge evening, and it was the housekeeper's evening off. The daily charwoman had, of course, left some time ago. So Clare herself opened the door.

"Beryl."

"May I see you?"

"Have you come to a decision?"

"I think so."

Clare held the door wider and stood aside as Beryl stepped into the hall. She hung Beryl's anorak in a closet.

She said, "I'm sure you've decided to be sensible. In time you'll come to realize I'm right, though it will be hard for you at first. But you must always remember that beauty is truth, truth beau-

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ty. I've always said that. You've heard me say that, haven't you?"

"Yes."

Beryl adjusted the scarf over her shoulders as she followed the small stiff figure up the stairs. If I had a brass farthing, she thought, for every time I've heard you say that . . .

The house was furnished very much as it had been in the time of Arthur's rich great-grandparents. Most of the changes had been confined to the necessary modernizing of bathrooms, kitchen, heating, and lighting. The general effect was of near-opulence in mahogany, velvet, damask, starred here and there with the gleam and sparkle of porcelain and crystal.

It was a house for a large family, but Arthur and Clare had no children. Nor would they have any. After the third year of their marriage, when the fact was established, Clare had explained, "We will never have children, I'm afraid. Arthur is sterile." It was about then that Arthur stopped asking friends to his house.

In the drawing room Clare indicated one of the wing chairs by the fireplace, and said, "Won't you sit down? Sherry? It's Amontillado, isn't it?"

"No, thank you." Immediately she realized that would seem brusque, even odd. So she continued, "I have dinner guests this evening. I mustn't stay long."

"Are you cooking something exciting?"

Beryl was irritated. Clare was merely making conversation. "Not especially. Pâté. Chicken with chestnuts, in wine. And fruit salad."

"People I know?" Clare poured Tio Pepe for herself, then took the chair opposite Beryl. Never a pretty woman, in middle age she had grown too thin and her skin had become sallow. The pale saffron silk of her dress and the sage green of the chair were unfortunate for her, and Beryl's clear ash-blonde coloring was striking by contrast.

As always when they were together, Beryl felt large and muscular in comparison. Even awkward, gawky. She looked down at her strong capable hands, clasped tightly now in her lap, and kept her voice steady as she answered, "Robert Talley is coming. And his brother and sister-in-law, Peter and Sue. They live at Richmond."

She knew her face was white and saw that Clare was studying her, Clare's thin little face tilted to one side as though from the weight of her great coil of gray hair.

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Clare said, "Will you tell him tonight?" And when Beryl didn't answer, "Well, will you? I've already given you a week."

Beryl's mouth was stiff. "Why in God's name can't you understand?"

"I do understand. We discussed it for nearly two hours, if you remember. I thought you had seen reason. You said downstairs you had come to a decision."

"But I had hoped—" She stopped, tried again. "You don't realize just how much Robert means to me."

Clare reached for a cigarette from the silver box, her small hand like a delicate claw. "You talk like a schoolgirl." She snapped the table lighter. "What I realize is that you see in Robert your chance to give up teaching. I know how much you hate it."

Abruptly Beryl stood and moved to the china display cabinet by the door, her back now to Clare and away from her clear all-knowing gaze.

"I shall be glad to give up teaching, that's true. But I love Robert."

"You loathe teaching."

Beryl stared into the cabinet, at the shelf of white Meissen; beautiful china, but now, and in Clare's presence, its whiteness was cold.

She said carefully, "Can you imagine what it is like for me? For some reason most of these girls don't seem to like cooking. I suppose that's my fault. But I feel like a writer who earns a living by writing seed catalogues—for people who can't read and won't learn. Can't you see? I don't want to *teach* cookery. I want to *do* it.

"I cannot tolerate the pedantry of school cookery. Did you know there could be pedantry in cooking? Always using the precisely correct utensils irrespective of convenience—that's pedantry; always clearing away the smallest rubbish, instantly; always attending to the smallest detail, instantly. Because, you see, the girls must learn only the correct basic procedures. You must never bend the rules, never improvise, never initiate, never originate. Detail, only detail after small detail. Routine, routine, routine! I've tried and I've tried—but I do not and cannot live my life that way."

Clare made a quick gesture of impatience. "You're afraid of the girls. And you can't control them. You can't bear their calling you 'Pudding.' Although I don't know what you expected, when your

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name is Puddenfoot. It's interesting that you teach cookery—the way a man named Coffin becomes an undertaker."

I hate you, thought Beryl. I do believe I *hate* you. And that will make it so much easier.

Clare went on, "As for your loving Robert, you are less eloquent about that, aren't you? In any case, you should know by now we can't have everything we want in this world."

Beryl whipped round to face her. "Everything? I don't want everything! I don't want every damned thing! I would like to have just something!"

"I think you had better control yourself. For such a pallid sort of person you can be strangely dramatic. Did you speak the same way about this Jimmy of yours?"

Beryl's mouth was dry. It seemed hard to breathe. She clutched her scarf tightly at her neck and her hands were hot through the silk.

"Oh, really, come and sit down." Clare moved irritably. "Why can't you see that what I'm telling you is for your own good? As well as for Robert's. And I must do my duty. It would be better for you to tell Robert yourself, but if you won't, then I must."

"Clare, I beg you—"

"I could not stand by and let Robert marry you under the impression that you're a single woman."

"I am single!"

"You are divorced. And Robert is a Catholic. A strict, practicing Catholic. I have known him for years, as long as you have, and I respect and admire him. He suffered enough during the last years of his wife's illness, and now that he's just about got over his wife's death it would be intolerable for you to do this to him. I cannot allow it. I thank God I met that friend of yours from all those years ago or I should never have known the truth."

Perhaps, Beryl thought, George Upwood had stood like this, facing Clare, and felt like this, and thought like this, when he heard Clare insist that he must tell his bed-ridden wife of his nine-year-old affair with Helen Barber. Otherwise Clare would tell her. It was Clare's duty. (Had he done so yet?)

And Jenny Norton. Perhaps she, too, had stood here, learning that her husband must be told of the pin-money she earned from a back-street photographer in Soho. (Had *she* told him yet?)

And Tom Grey; and Tom's son, Barry; and that dog breeder, Carter or Carlton, and—

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Beryl stood straight and stiff as she said, "Have you talked to anyone else about my being divorced?"

"Certainly not. I promised you the chance to speak first, and I keep my word."

"But your housekeeper heard us quarreling when I was here last week."

"I was not quarreling. You were. You have only yourself to blame if you raised your voice."

"How did you explain it to her?"

"Explain?" Clare stared. "Don't be absurd. Why on earth should I explain to my housekeeper? This situation with Robert has certainly affected you. I don't know what your parents would have said. But Robert must get an explanation. He is entitled to know the truth. If not from you, then from me. On that I am determined."

Beryl sighed. She slipped the scarf from her shoulders, holding it loosely as she moved carefully, casually, across the room to the back of Clare's chair.

"Jimmy and I were far too young," Beryl said. "Some people are mature enough for early marriage, but we were not. There was so much we didn't understand. About each other. For him, I would have needed to be a masochist. It was really quite dreadful." For a moment the scarf drooped limply in her hands.

Then she continued, "After the divorce I used my maiden name and came here where no one knew me. I just wanted to forget it, blot it out, start over again. And really, I think I did. Nothing had happened. I never had been married."

She held the scarf taut now and raised her hands.

Clare leaned forward for another cigarette.

"In any case," Clare said, leaning back, "you may not really be losing anything at all, you know. After all, Robert hasn't actually asked you to marry him. Personally, I doubt if he intends to. He probably regards you as useful, cooking and more or less housekeeping for him since his wife died. I doubt if it's occurred to him that you could ever be any more than a sort of unpaid—"

The scarf was pulled tighter, and tighter, and tighter. Clare's struggles were puny against the strength now in Beryl's much larger hands and arms. But it seemed to take a long time. And it was not quiet. Beryl would remember that later. She would remember it for the rest of her life.

When it was over, she removed the scarf, and Clare fell side-

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ways and forward against the arm of the chair. Her hair, uncompromisingly and honestly gray, had sprung loose from its pins and mercifully covered her face.

Beryl moved quickly.

She glanced round swiftly. There was no sign of her visit. There was no sherry glass bearing her fingerprints. There would be no surface anywhere bearing her fingerprints. She had been careful not to take off her gloves.

Now for the telephone extension, held by the mouthpiece, very carefully in the scarf. Fingerprints must be here, but not hers, and not smudges. She dialed 999 for Emergency, and in tones of great agitation called for the police. Connected, she cried loudly, "Help me, please! This is Mrs. Borden—" Then, screaming, "No, no, don't—"

She dropped the phone so that it first hit the table and then dangled over the edge. She screamed again, while the telephone squawked, "Hello, hello? Are you there? Hello—"

The call would be traced very quickly since she had given the name of the subscriber. The first police car would arrive in a matter of minutes.

So the exact time of attack had been established, and time mattered now.

So, quickly out of the room, down the stairs, grab her coat, out of the house, door left open . . .

She posted her letter in the mail box nearest her house—three minutes' walk from her house. She had timed it. The time was now 6:20 and the mail was picked up at 6:30.

Robert's train from London was due at 6:20. Tonight it must not be late. It must not be late. She waited.

It must not be late.

Not too late.

She waited.

Dear heaven, it must not be *too*—

He came striding round the corner, immaculately tailored and carrying his briefcase and a furled umbrella. He was tall, with a strong firm jaw and thin aquiline nose, and Beryl loved him. A kindly, considerate man. Not, she was sure, a man who would demand masochism.

Did she love him? Was it love? Was Clare right, did she *not* love him? Never mind, never mind, he was escape from school, from the stupid children, from the clever children, and she'd be

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good to him, and kind, and—

"Robert! Hello!"

"Hello, there."

"I'm a little out of breath. I hurried to catch the post."

They fell into step, Robert shortening his stride to suit hers. His house was next door to Beryl's. He looked down at her, smiling.

"Urgent letter? It's a damn nuisance the last collection from this box should be so early."

"And I nearly forgot. I was right in the middle of preparing the fruit salad for tonight. I just dashed out and left everything on the kitchen table. At least it wasn't far to go."

It wasn't nearly so far as Clare's house. And any one of several people could have been with Clare. George Upwood, for instance; Jenny Norton; Tom Grey, who had covered up his son's fraud; the dog breeder who had cheated at the show; the girl at the supermarket who had fiddled with the change and lost her job. And others. Many others, known to someone, known to several, as by now her own quarrel with Clare would be known. And among them, which to accuse? And who could possibly accuse Beryl, when her alibi was so unbreakable?

At the gate to Beryl's house Robert hesitated. "I hope you haven't been to too much trouble for this evening. You've already done a very great deal for me since I've been on my own. The last thing I wish is to impose—"

"What nonsense! When you told me you were taking Peter and Sue out to dinner I was horrified. You can so easily have a home-cooked meal here. But if I could ask a favor—"

"Of course."

"That wretched kitchen window. It jammed again, about an hour ago. The house is freezing. I was going to call you."

He smiled. "Then we are well met."

She led the way into the house and along the hall into the kitchen, where he would be her witness.

"My fruit salad." She gestured and laughed. "It breaks all the rules to allow a guest to see a meal in the making. Thank goodness I wasn't away long enough for anything to have spoiled."

He laughed with her. "Obviously there was no need to worry. But how very odd . . ."

They both stared at the table. The quarters of apple were still white. Nearby, untreated by lemon juice, the peel and the core were quite shriveled and brown.

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a NEW animal story by

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

In the September 1974 issue of EQMM we brought you Patricia Highsmith's "Day of Reckoning," a crime story about chickens. "Day of Reckoning" was by no means an ordinary story—indeed, it was so out of the ordinary that some readers considered it one of the most unusual stories we have ever published.

At the time we did not realize that Patricia Highsmith's story about chickens was one of a series of thirteen animal stories, a collection that will appear in volume form under the title of THE ANIMAL LOVERS' BOOK OF BEASTLY MURDERS. *Eleven of the stories concern a cat, ferret, elephant, dog, goat, horse, monkey, rat, pig, hamsters, and pigeons. The thirteenth tale is about Djemal, a camel, and it is that story we now give you—again, a most unusual study of an animal's relationship with human beings. Patricia Highsmith has extraordinary empathy—"intellectual identification with or vicarious experiencing of feelings, thoughts, and attitudes"—for all earthly creatures, large and small. . .*

THE TALE OF DJEMAL

by PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

Deep in the Arab desert lived Djemal, with his master Mahmet. They slept in the desert, because it was cheaper. By day they trudged, Mahmet riding, to the nearest town, Elu-Bana, where Djemal gave rides to tourists—squealing women in summer dresses and nervous men in shorts. It was about the only time Mahmet walked.

Djemal was aware that the other Arabs didn't care for Mahmet. A faint groan came from other camel drivers when he and

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Mahmet approached. There was much haggling over prices between Mahmet and the other drivers who would at once pounce on him. Hands would fly and voices rise madly. But no one exchanged dinars, only talked about them. Finally Mahmet would lead Djemal to the group of staring tourists, tap Djemal, and yell a command for him to kneel.

The hair on Djemal's knees, front legs, and back, was quite worn off, so his skin there looked like old leather. As for the rest of him, he was shaggy brown with some clotted patches, with other patches nearly bare as if moths had been at him. But his big brown eyes were clear, and his generous, intelligent lips had a pleasant look as if he were constantly smiling, though this was far from the truth. At any rate, Djemal was only 17, in the prime of life, and unusually large and strong. He was shedding now because it was summer.

"Oooooh—eeeeeek!" a plump lady screamed, jolted from side to side as Djemal stood up to his impressive full height. "The ground looks miles away!"

"Don't fall! Hang on! That sand's not as soft as it looks!" warned an Englishman's voice.

Little filthy Mahmet, in dusty robes, tugged at Djemal's bridle, and off they went at walking pace, Djemal slapping his broad feet down on the sand and gazing about wherever he wished—at the white domes of the town against the blue sky, at an automobile purring along the road, at a yellow mountain of lemons by the roadside, at other camels walking or loading or unloading their human cargo. This woman, any human being, felt like no weight at all, nothing like the huge sacks of lemons or oranges he often had to carry, or the sacks of plaster, or even the bundles of young trees that he sometimes transported far into the desert.

Once in a while even the tourists would argue in their hesitant, puzzled-sounding voices with Mahmet. Some argument about price. Everything was price. Everything came down to dinars. Dinars, paper and coin, could make men whip out daggers or raise fists and hit each other in the face.

Turbaned Mahmet in his pointed, turned-up-toed shoes and billowing old djellaba, looked more like an Arab than the Arabs. He meant himself to be a tourist attraction, photogenic—he charged a small fee to be photographed—with a gold ring in one ear and a pinched, suntanned visage which was almost hidden under bushy eyebrows and an untended beard. One could hardly see his mouth

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in all the hair. His eyes were tiny and black.

The reason the other camel drivers hated him was because he did not abide by the set price for a camel ride that the others had established. Mahmet would promise to stick to it, then if a tourist happened to approach him with a pitiable attempt to bargain—as Mahmet knew they had been advised to do—Mahmet would lower the price slightly, thus getting himself some business, and putting the tourist in such a good mood from having succeeded in bargaining, that the tourist often tipped more than the difference at the end of the ride.

On the other hand, if business was good, Mahmet would increase his price, knowing it would be accepted, and he sometimes did this in the hearing of the other drivers. Not that the other drivers were paragons of honesty, but they had informal agreements, and mostly they stuck to them. For Mahmet's dishonesty Djemal sometimes suffered a stone thrown against his rump, a stone meant for Mahmet.

After a good tourist day, which often went on till nearly dark, Mahmet would tie Djemal up to a palm tree in town and treat himself to a meal of couscous in a shack of a restaurant which had a terrace and a squawking parrot. Meanwhile Djemal might not even have had any water, because Mahmet took care of his own needs first, and Djemal would nibble the tree leaves he could reach. Mahmet ate alone at a table, avoided by the other camel drivers who sat at another table together, making a lot of merry noise. One of them played a stringed instrument between courses. Mahmet chewed his lamb bones in silence and wiped his fingers on his robes. He left no tip.

Maybe he took Djemal to the public fountain, maybe he didn't, but he rode while Djemal walked into the desert to the clump of trees where Mahmet made his camp every night. Djemal could not always see in the darkness, but his sense of smell guided him to the bundle of clothing of Mahmet, the rolled-up tent, the leather waterbags, all of which were permeated with Mahmet's own sweaty, sharp scent.

In the early mornings it was usually lemon-hauling in the hot summer months. Thank Allah, Mahmet thought, the government had established "camel ride" hours for the tourists, ten to twelve in the mornings, six to nine evenings, so it left the drivers free to earn money during the day, and to do all the tourist business in concentrated hours.

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Now as the big orange sun sank on the horizon of sand, Mahmet and Djemal were out of hearing of the muezzin in Elu-Bana. Besides, Mahmet had his transistor radio on, a little gadget not much bigger than his fist, which he could prop on his shoulder amid folds of the djellaba. Now it was a wailing and endless song, with a man singing in falsetto. Mahmet hummed, as he spread a tattered rug on the sand and threw more rags on the top. This was his bed.

"Djemal! Put yourself there!" said Mahmet, pointing to a side he had discovered was windward of the place where he intended to sleep. Djemal gave out considerable heat, as well as blocking the gritty breeze.

Djemal went on eating dry brush several yards away. Mahmet came over and whacked him with a braided leather whip. It did not hurt Djemal. It was a ritual, which he let continue for a few minutes before he tore himself away from the dark green shrubs. Fortunately he wasn't thirsty that night.

"Oy-yah-yah-yah," said the transistor.

Djemal knelt down, turning himself slightly against the wishes of Mahmet, so that the light wind very nearly struck him straight in the tail. Djemal didn't want sand up his nose. He stretched his long neck out, put his head down, almost closed his nostrils, and closed his eyes completely. After a while he felt Mahmet settling against his left side, tugging at the old red blanket in which he wrapped himself, settling his sandaled heels in the sand. Mahmet slept as he rested, almost sitting up.

Sometimes Mahmet read a bit in the Koran, mumbling. He could hardly read at all, but he knew a lot of it by heart, since childhood. His school had consisted, as the schools consisted even now, of a roomful of children sitting on the floor repeating phrases uttered by a tall man in a djellaba who prowled among them, taking long strides over their heads, reading phrases from the Koran. This wisdom, these words were like poetry to Mahmet—pretty enough when one read it, but of no use in everyday life.

This evening Mahmet's Koran—a chunky little book with curled corners and nearly obliterated print—remained in his woven knapsack along with sticky dates and a hunk of stale bread. Mahmet was thinking of the forthcoming National Camel Race. He scratched a flea somewhere under his left arm.

The camel race started tomorrow evening and lasted for a week.

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It went from Elu-Bana to Khassa, a big port and a major city of the country, where there were even more tourists. The drivers camped out at night, of course, and were supposed to carry their food and water supplies, and make a stop at Souk Mandela, where the camels were to drink, then push on.

Mahmet went over his plans. No stop at Souk Mandela, for one thing. That was why he was making Djemal go dry now. When Djemal drank tomorrow, and again just before the race started in the evening, he could go seven days, Mahmet thought, without water, and Mahmet hoped to finish the race in six, anyway.

Traditionally the Elu-Bana to Khassa race was very close, drivers flogging their camels at the finish. The prize was 300 dinars, quite enough to be interesting.

Mahmet pulled the red blanket over his head and felt secure and self-sufficient. He hadn't a wife, he hadn't even a family—rather he had one in a faraway town, but they disliked him, and he them, so Mahmet never thought about them. He'd stolen as a boy, and the police had come a few times too often to his family's house, warning him and his parents, so Mahmet had left at the age of 13.

From then on, he'd led a nomadic existence, shining shoes in the capital, working for a while as waiter until he was caught stealing out of the till, then picking pockets in museums and mosques, then as runner for a fence during which time he'd been shot in the calf by a policeman's bullet, giving him a permanent limp. Mahmet was 37 or 38, maybe even 40, he wasn't quite sure.

When he won the National Camel Race money, he intended to make a down payment on a little house in Elu-Bana. He'd seen the two-room white house with running cold water and a tiny fireplace. It was up for sale cheap, because the owner had been murdered in his bed, and nobody wanted to live there. . .

The next day Djemal was surprised by the relative lightness of his work. He and Mahmet cruised along the lemon mountains on the outskirts of Elu-Bana, and Djemal's two huge sacks were loaded and unloaded four times before the sun went down, but that was nothing. Ordinarily Djemal would have been prodded much faster along the roads.

"Ho-ya! Djemal!" someone shouted.

"Mahmet! F-wisssssss!"

There was excitement. Djemal didn't know why. Men clapped their hands. Praise or disapproval? Djemal was aware that no one

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liked his master, and Djemal took some of this ill-feeling, therefore apprehension, on himself. Djemal was ever wary against a sneaky blow, something thrown at him, meant for Mahmet. The huge trucks pulled out, loaded with lemons brought by scores of camels. Drivers sat resting, leaning against their camels' bellies or squatting on their heels. As Djemal walked out of the compound, one camel for no reason stretched his head forward and nipped Djemal's rump.

Djemal turned quickly and lifted a protruding upper lip, baring powerful long front teeth, and snapped back, not quite catching the camel's nose. The driver on the other camel was nearly thrown by his camel's recoil, and cursed Mahmet roundly.

Mahmet gave back as good as he got.

Though Djemal was already full of water, Mahmet led him again to the town trough. Djemal drank a little, slowly, pausing to lift his head and sniff the breeze; he smelled the perfume of tourists from afar. And he also heard loud music, not unusual as transistor radios blared all day from every direction, but this music was bigger and more solid. Djemal felt a wallop on his left hind leg. Mahmet was walking, in front of him now, pulling his rein.

There were flags, a grandstand, tourists, and a couple of loudspeakers out of which the music came. All this at the edge of the desert. Camels were lined up. A man was speaking, his voice unnaturally loud. The camels looked good. Was it a race?

Djemal had once been in a race with Mahmet riding him, and Djemal remembered that he had run faster than the others. That was last year, when Mahmet had acquired Djemal. Djemal had a fleeting recollection of his first master, who had trained him. This man had been tall, kind, and rather old. He had argued with Mahmet, doubtless over dinars, and Mahmet had won. That was how Djemal saw it, because Mahmet had taken Djemal away with him.

Djemal was suddenly in a line with the other camels. A whistle blew. Mahmet whacked him, and Djemal loped ahead, taking a minute or two to get into stride. Then he was galloping straight into the setting sun. He was ahead. It was easy. Djemal began to breathe regularly, settling down to keep the pace for a long time, if necessary. Where were they going? Djemal could not smell leaves or water, and he was unfamiliar with the terrain.

Ka-pa-la-pop, ka-pa-la-pop . . . The hoofbeats of the camels be-

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hind Djemal faded out of hearing. Djemal went a trifle slower. Mahmet did not whack him. Djemal heard Mahmet chuckle a little. The moon rose and they kept on, Djemal walking now. He was a little tired. They stopped, Mahmet drank from his water-sack, ate something, and bundled himself up against Djemal's side as usual. But there was no tree, no shelter where they lay that night. The land was flat and wide.

The next morning they set off at dawn, Mahmet having had a mug of sweet coffee brewed on his spirit lamp. He switched on his transistor, and held it in the crook of his leg which was cocked over Djemal's shoulder. Not a camel was in sight behind him. Nevertheless, Mahmet urged Djemal on at a fair pace. Judging from Djemal's firm hump behind him, he was good for four or five days more without showing any sign of flagging. Still Mahmet looked to right and left for any lines of trees, any kind of foliage that could give shelter from the sun, however brief.

When noon came, they had to stop. The heat of the sun had begun to penetrate even Mahmet's turban, and sweat ran into his eyebrows. For the first time Mahmet threw a cloth over Djemal's head to shelter it from the sun, and they rested till nearly four in the afternoon. Mahmet had no watch but he could tell time quite well by the sun.

The next day was the same, except that Mahmet and Djemal found some trees—but no water. Mahmet knew the territory vaguely. Either he had been over it years before, or someone had told him about it, he couldn't quite remember. There was no water except at Souk Mandela, where the contestants were supposed to stop. That was a detour off the straight course, and Mahmet had no intention of stopping there. On the other hand, he thought it best to give Djemal an extra long rest at midday and to make up for this by traveling far into the night. This they did. Mahmet navigated by the stars.

Djemal could have done all right for five days without water, with moderate pace and load, but Djemal was often loping. By the noonday rest of the sixth day Djemal was feeling the strain. Mahmet mumbled the Koran. There was a wind, which blew Mahmet's coffee brewer flame out a couple of times. Djemal rested with his tail directly toward the wind, his nostrils open just enough to breathe.

It was the edge of a windstorm, not the storm itself, Mahmet saw. He patted Djemal's head briefly. Mahmet was thinking that

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the other camels and their drivers were in the worst of the storm, since the gloom lay in the direction of Souk Mandela to the north. Mahmet was hoping they'd all be delayed.

Mahmet was wrong, as he discovered on the seventh day. This was the day they were supposed to finish the race. Mahmet started at dawn when the sand was so whirling around him that he didn't bother trying to prepare coffee; instead he chewed a few coffee beans. Mahmet began to think that the storm had moved down to him, on his direct route to Khassa, and that his competitors had perhaps not done too badly by stopping at Souk Mandela for water, then resuming a direct course to Khassa, because this would put them at the northern edge of the storm, not in the middle.

It was difficult for Djemal to make good progress, since he had to keep his nostrils half shut against the sand and consequently couldn't breathe well. Mahmet, riding on his shoulders and leaning over his neck, flogged him nervously to go ever faster. Djemal sensed that Mahmet was scared. If Djemal couldn't see or smell where he was going, how could Mahmet? Was Mahmet out of water? Maybe.

Djemal's right shoulder became sore, then bled from Mahmet's whip. It hurt worse there, which was why Mahmet didn't try the other shoulder, Djemal supposed. Djemal knew Mahmet well by now. He knew that Mahmet intended to be paid somehow for his efforts, for Djemal's efforts, or Mahmet wouldn't be putting himself to so much discomfort. Djemal also had a vague notion that he was in competition with the other camels he had seen at Elu-Bana, because Djemal had been forced to do other "races" in the form of running faster than other camels toward a group of tourists when Mahmet had spotted them half a mile away.

"Hay-yee! Hay-yee!" Mahmet cried, bouncing up and down and wielding the whip.

At least they were getting out of the sandstorm. The pale haze of the sun could be seen now and then, still a long way above the horizon. Djemal stumbled and fell, tossing Mahmet off. Djemal got a mouthful of sand and would have loved to lie there for several minutes, recovering, but Mahmet flogged him up, shouting.

Mahmet had lost his transistor, and went scrambling and scuffling about for it in the sand. When he found it, he kicked Djemal unmercifully in the rump because Djemal had lain down again.

Mahmet cursed.

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Djemal did likewise, blowing his breath out and baring his two formidable front teeth before he gradually hauled himself up with a slow bitter dignity. Stupefied by heat and thirst, Djemal saw Mahmet fuzzily, and was exasperated enough to attack him, except that he was weak from fatigue. Mahmet whacked him and gave him the command to kneel. Djemal knelt, and Mahmet mounted.

They were moving again. Djemal's feet became ever heavier and dragged in the sand. But he could now smell people. Water. Then he heard music—the ordinary wailing music of Arabian transistors, but louder, as if several were playing in unison. Mahmet whacked Djemal again and again on the shoulder, shouting encouragement. Djemal saw no reason to exert himself, since the goal was plainly in sight, but he did his best to walk fast, hoping that this would make Mahmet ease up on the whip.

"Yeh—yah!" The cheers grew louder.

Djemal's mouth was now open and dry. Just before he reached the people his eyesight failed him. So did his leg muscles. His knees, then his side hit the sand. The hump on his back sagged limp, empty like his mouth and his stomach.

And Mahmet beat him, yelling.

The crowd both moaned and yelled. Djemal didn't care. He felt he was dying. Why didn't someone bring him water? Mahmet was now lighting matches under Djemal's heels. Djemal barely twitched. He would have bitten through Mahmet's neck with pleasure, but he hadn't the strength. Then Djemal lost consciousness.

With fury and resentment Mahmet saw a camel and its driver walk across the finish line. Then another. The camels looked tired, but they were not dead-tired like Djemal. There was no room for pity in Mahmet's mind. Djemal had failed him. Djemal who was supposed to be so strong.

When a couple of the camel drivers jeered at Mahmet and made nasty remarks about his not having given his camel water—a fact which was obvious—Mahmet cursed them back. Mahmet threw a bucket of water onto Djemal's head and brought him to. Then Mahmet watched, grinding his teeth, as the winner of the race—a fat old swine who had always snubbed Mahmet in Elu-Bana—received his prize in the form of a paper check. Naturally the government wasn't going to hand out that money in cash, because it might be stolen in the crowd.

Djemal drank water that night and ate a bit. Mahmet did not

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give him food, but there were bushes and trees where they spent the night. They were on the edge of the city of Khassa. The next day, having taken on provisions—bread, dates, water, and a couple of dry sausages for himself—Mahmet started off with Djemal across the desert again. Djemal was still a little tired and could have rested for another day. Was Mahmet going to stop somewhere for water this time? Djemal hoped so. At least they weren't racing.

Near noon, when they had to rest under shade, Djemal's right front leg gave under him as he was kneeling for Mahmet to dismount. Mahmet tumbled onto the sand, then jumped up and struck Djemal a couple of times on the head with his whip handle.

"Stupid!" Mahmet shouted in Arabic.

Djemal bit at the whip and caught it. When Mahmet lunged for the whip, Djemal bit again and got Mahmet's wrist.

Mahmet screamed.

Djemal got to his feet, inspired to further attack. How he hated this smelly little creature who considered himself his "master"!

"Aaaah! Back! Down!" Mahmet yelled, and brandished the whip, retreating.

Djemal walked steadily toward Mahmet, his teeth bared, his eyes big and red with fury. Mahmet ran and took shelter behind the bending trunk of a date tree. Djemal circled the tree. He could smell the sharp stink of Mahmet's terror.

Mahmet was snatching off his old djellaba. He pulled off his turban and flung both at Djemal.

Surprised, Djemal bit into the smelly clothes, shaking his head as if he had his teeth in Mahmet's neck. Djemal snorted and attacked the turban, now unwound in a long dirty length. He ate part of it and stomped his big front feet on the rest.

Mahmet, behind his tree, began to breathe more easily. He knew that camels could vent their wrath on the clothes of the man they hated, and that was usually the end of it. He hoped so. He didn't fancy walking back to Khassa. He wanted to go to Elu-Bana, which he considered "home."

Djemal at last lay down. He was tired, almost too tired to bother putting himself in the patchy shade under the date tree. He slept. . .

Mahmet prodded him awake, carefully. The sun was setting. Djemal nipped at him, missing. Mahmet thought it wise to ignore it.

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"Up, Djemal!" Up—and we go!" said Mahmet.

Djemal plodded. He plodded on into the night, feeling the faint trail more than seeing it in the sand. The night was cool.

On the third day they arrived at Souk Mandela, a busy market town, though small. Mahmet had decided to sell Djemal here. So he made for the open market where braziers, rugs, jewelry, camel saddles, pots and pans, and just about everything was for sale and on display on the ground. Camels were for sale too, at one corner. He led Djemal there, Mahmet being careful to walk far enough ahead so that Djemal would not bite him.

"Cheap," Mahmet said to the dealer. "Six hundred dinars. He's a fine camel, you can see that. And he just won the Elu-Bana to Khassa race!"

"Oh, yes? That's not the way we heard it!" said a turbaned camel driver who was listening, and a couple of others laughed. "He collapsed!"

"Yes, we heard you didn't stop for water, you crooked old fool!" said someone else.

"Even so—" Mahmet began, and dodged as Djemal's teeth came at him.

"Ha! Ha! Even a camel doesn't like this one!" said one old beard.

"Four hundred!" Mahmet screamed. "With the saddle!"

A man pointed to Djemal's beaten shoulder which was still bloody and on which flies had settled, as if it were a serious and permanent defect, and offered 250 dinars.

Mahmet accepted. Cash. The man had to go home to get it. Mahmet waited sullenly in some shade, watching the dealer and another man leading Djemal to the market water trough. He had lost a good camel—lost money, even more painful—but Mahmet was damned glad to be rid of Djemal His life was worth more than money, after all.

That afternoon Mahmet caught an uncomfortable bus to Elu-Bana. He was carrying his gear, empty watersacks, spirit lamp, cooking pot, and blanket. He slept like the dead in an alley behind the restaurant where he often ate couscous. The next morning, with a clear vision of his bad luck, and the stinging memory of the low price he had got for one of the best camels in the country, Mahmet pilfered from a tourist's car. He found a plaid blanket and a bonus beneath it—a camera—a silver flask in the glove compartment, and a brown-paper-wrapped parcel that contained a

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small rug evidently just bought in the market. This theft took less than a minute, because the car was unlocked. It was in front of a shabby bar, and a couple of barefoot adolescent boys sitting at a table in the sand merely laughed when they saw Mahmet doing it.

Mahmet sold his loot before noon for 70 dinars—the camera was a good German one—which made him feel slightly better. With his own cache of dinars which he carried with him, sewn into a fold of blanket, Mahmet now had nearly 500. He could buy another camel of sorts, not as good as Djemal who had cost him 400 dinars. And he would have enough to put something down on the little house he wanted. The tourist season was on, and Mahmet needed a camel to earn money, because camel driving was the only thing he knew.

Meanwhile Djemal had fallen into good hands. A poor but decent man called Chak had bought him to add to his string of three. Chak mainly hauled lemons and oranges and did other kinds of transport work with his camels, but in the tourist season he also gave camel rides. Chak was delighted with Djemal's grace and willingness with the tourists. Because Djemal was so tall, he was often preferred by the tourists who wanted "a view."

Djemal's sore shoulder was now quite healed; he was well fed, not overworked, and content with his new master and his life. His memory of Mahmet was growing dimmer, mainly because he never encountered him—Elu-Bana had many routes in and out of it. Djemal often worked miles away, and Chak's home was a few miles outside of town, where Djemal slept with the other camels under a shelter near the house where Chak lived with his family.

One day in early autumn, when the weather was a trifle cooler and most of the tourists had gone, Djemal picked up the scent of Mahmet. Djemal was just then entering the big fruit market in Elu-Bana, carrying a heavy load of grapefruit. Huge trucks were being loaded with boxes of dates and pineapples, and the scene was noisy with men talking and yelling and transistors everywhere were blaring different programs. Djemal didn't see Mahmet, but the hair on his neck rose a little, and he expected a blow out of nowhere. He knelt at Chak's command, and the burdens slipped from his sides.

Then he saw Mahmet just a camel's length in front of him. Djemal got to his feet. Mahmet saw Djemal also, took a second or two to make sure he was Djemal, then jumped back.

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"So—your old camel, eh?" another camel driver said to Mahmet, jerking a thumb toward Djemal. "Still afraid of him, Mahmet?"

"I never was afraid of him!" Mahmet shouted.

"Ha-ha!"

A couple of other drivers joined the conversation.

Djemal saw Mahmet twitch, talking all the while. Djemal could smell him well, and his hatred rose afresh. Djemal moved toward Mahmet.

"Ha! Ha! Watch out, Mahmet!" laughed a turbaned driver, who was a little drunk on wine.

Mahmet retreated.

Djemal followed, walking. He continued to walk, even though he heard Chak calling him. Then Djemal broke into a lope, as Mahmet vanished behind a truck. When Djemal reached the truck, Mahmet darted toward a small house, a shed of some kind for the market drivers.

To Mahmet's horror the shed door was locked. He ran behind the shed.

Djemal bore down and seized Mahmet's djellaba and part of his back in his teeth. Mahmet fell, and Djemal stomped him, and stomped him again.

"Look! It's a fight!"

A dozen men, then more gathered around to watch, laughing, at first urging one another to go in and put a stop to it—but nobody did. On the contrary, someone passed a jug of red wine around.

Mahmet screamed. Djemal now came down with his foot again, hard. Then it was over. Mahmet stopped moving.

The crowd howled. They were safe; the camel wasn't going to attack *them,* and to a man they had detested Mahmet, who was not only stingy but dishonest, even with people whom he led to think were his friends.

"What a camel! What's his name?"

"Djemal. Ha-ha!"

"Used to be Mahmet's camel," someone repeated, as if the whole crowd didn't know that.

At last Chak burst through. "Djemal! Ho! Stop, Djemal!"

"This is terrible!" cried Chak.

The men surrounded Chak, telling him it wasn't terrible, telling him they would get rid of the body, somewhere. No, no, there was no need to call the police. Absurd! Have some wine, Chak! Even some of the truck drivers had joined them, smiling with

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sinister amusement at what had happened behind the shed.

Djemal, head high now, had begun to calm down. He could smell blood along with the stench of Mahmet. Haughtily he stepped over his victim, lifting each foot carefully, and rejoined his master Chak, who was still nervous.

"No, no," Chak was saying, because the men, all a bit tipsy now, were offering Chak 700 and more dinars for Djemal. Chak was shaken by the events, but at the same time he was proud of Djemal, and wouldn't have parted with him for 1000 dinars at that moment.

Djemal smiled. He lifted his head and looked coolly through his long-lashed eyes toward the horizon. Men patted his flanks, his shoulders. Mahmet was dead. Djemal's anger, like a poison, was out of his blood. He followed Chak, without a lead, as Chak walked away, looking back and calling to him. Djemal had had his revenge.

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GOOD NEWS
from the publisher of EQMM

Good news! Beginning in this issue we are providing you, our loyal readers, with an additional service — a nine-page feature, EQ's Mystery Newsletter.

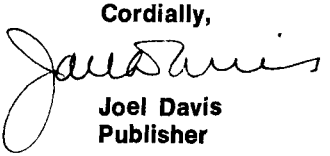
What exactly will it contain? First, we will expand the regular book-review section to include publishers' own reviews of their upcoming key mystery and suspense titles. John Dickson Carr will continue his popular review column, The Jury Box; this will be augmented by new and interesting material covering personal interviews with authors and the latest developments in films, television, and radio. All this editorial material will deal exclusively with mystery, detection, and suspense.

In addition to the above, we are providing a brand-new service to our readers—the EQ Book Department. Now, if you are unable to locate your favorite books at your local bookstore, we will arrange to order them for you at a substantial discount—at least 20%, sometimes even more. Please note that for the present you may order only those books mentioned in EQ's Mystery Newsletter.

Why are we doing this in spite of the increased cost of additional pages and the extra editorial charges? First, we think you will like reading the Newsletter, and second, we think you will like the opportunity to save money by taking advantage of our new book-ordering service.

To partially defray our added costs we are raising the price of EQMM one nickel. We believe this is a small price to pay for EQ's Mystery Newsletter, which we are testing in this issue, December 1975, and in the January and February 1976 issues. If you would like us to continue the Newsletter, or have any suggestions to improve it, please drop me a personal note. I'd be most grateful.

Cordially,



Joel Davis
Publisher

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

SAYERS ASTRAY: Clouds of scandal permeate *Such a Strange Lady* (Harper & Row, $8.95), Janet Hitchman's biography of the reputedly devout creator of Lord Peter Wimsey. According to the documents in the case, the famous author gave birth to an illegitimate son in 1924, then married a ne'er-do-well barfly one gaudy night about two years later. In 1934, the ill-suited couple adopted the boy, who continued to be raised by a cousin. Hitchman also provides evidence that Sayers had numerous romantic entanglements with a variety of suspicious characters and handsome playboys. Eric Whelpton, whose body partially served as a model for Lord Peter, is quoted as saying, "I was in love with her mind and she was in love with my body."

HOLMES ON THE RANGE: Nicholas Meyer was right on target wth his first book about Sherlock Holmes. *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* (E. P. Dutton, $6.95) was on the best-seller list most of the year, and the first paperback printing exceeded a million copies. When the motion picture appears, it will star Laurence Olivier, Alan Arkin, Orson Welles, Vanessa Redgrave and Nicol Williamson (as Holmes), among others. Because the book could safely be called a success without stretching a point, Meyer's publisher, E. P. Dutton, made him an offer he couldn't abuse. The wheeling and dealing is concluded, and reports are that his next book, *The Eight-Per-Cent Solution,* which will again feature Holmes, will net him a guaranteed $850,000 for the hardcover and paperback rights, plus the screenplay. And that's the minimum! With just a little sheer luck, the ante will go beyond a million dollars. Although Meyer once denied being a Sherlockian on a syndicated television program, he has a firm grip on the Master's coattails. Ah, the green, green grasp of Holmes.

BLOODY APPETITE: The foreign objects beneath the cream sauce at yesterday's lunch is still a mystery to me, but that has nothing to do with the many mystery-oriented cookbooks being offered

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to would-be chefs. The most intriguing of the lot may be *Madame Maigret's Recipes* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, $8.95), compiled by the distinguished French gourmet Robert Courtine to celebrate Georges Simenon's 70th birthday. More than 100 recipes of "good honest (naturally—what else would you expect from the wife of France's most illustrious detective?) cooking" fill this deliciously illustrated volume.

The New 60 Minute Chef (Bantam, $1.25) is designed for the cook who can't wait to get out of the kitchen. Every recipe can be completed in no more than an hour. It was compiled by Carol Truax and Lillian Bueno McCue—better known in these pages as Lillian de la Torre, creator of Dr. Sam: Johnson, detector, the incomparable 18th-century sleuth.

And don't forget *The Nero Wolfe Cook Book* (Viking, $7.95) by Rex Stout and the editors of The Viking Press. Published in 1973, it is the most exalted of all recipe collections. As Wolfe himself says, "I beg you not to entrust these dishes to your cook unless he is an artist. Cook them yourself, and only for an occasion that is worthy of them. They are items for an epicure, but are neither finicky nor pretentious; you and your guests will find them as satisfying to the appetite as they are pleasing to the palate."

Another older title is Jeanine Marmouth's *Murder on the Menu* (Scribners, $7.95), which contains recipes by Charlotte Turgeon—a compendium of food and drink in the English mystery novel.

Finally, keep a sharp eye out for the Sherlock Holmes cookbook planned by Julie Rosenblatt and Fritz Sonnenschmidt of the CIA (the initials stand for Culinary Institute of America). Bobbs-Merrill will publish it but it won't be out in time for this Christmas.

Armed with even a sampling of these books, a good chef ought to be able to cook anyone's goose.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Private eyes have not been neglected on the screen this year.

His face sagging and weary, his clothes unpressed, Robert Mitchum (now well into his fifties) at first does not appear young enough to play the 38-year-old Philip Marlowe of *Farewell, My Lovely*. But he is given an opening narrative—and nearly everything Mitchum says in the film is in the form of splendid asides to the audience—about "feeling old, tired," setting the pace for this beaten, drugged, harassed private eye's journey through the

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nightmarishly dark back streets of 1940's Los Angeles. After a few minutes of adjustment he seems exactly right.

Farewell, My Lovely has been filmed twice before: with Dick Powell in the landmark, Edgar-winning *Murder, My Sweet* of 1944, and trimmed and altered for use as a "B" Falcon adventure two years previously, *The Falcon Takes Over.* Now, in the first screen version of a Raymond Chandler book to be deliberately set in period, and faithful to its source (at least in spirit), *Farewell* again has the hulking Moose Malloy involve Marlowe in his search for the long-lost little Velma—a search that begins in the honky-tonk Negro bars and crumbling hotels of Central Avenue and moves on to other areas of the corrupt city.

The entire cast is good, especially Charlotte Rampling as the sensual Mrs. Grayle, who makes even the act of crossing her legs unbearably wicked.

Director Dick Richards is pleased with the film, and with Mitchum, whom he insisted play Marlowe. "The part had been waiting thirty years for Mitchum to claim it," he says. "He is a man of virtue wrapped in a cloak of cynicism." Richards filmed *Farewell* against the fast-vanishing architecture of the 1940's still found in Los Angeles, paying particular care to details of the period. Perhaps the most poignant evocation of the past occurs when Marlowe walks by a newsstand lined with lurid-covered detective pulp magazines.

Paul Newman once again plays Lew Archer, redubbed "Harper," in an adaptation of Ross Macdonald's *The Drowning Pool,* which is taken out of its Southern California setting and relocated in New Orleans. Uncondonable tampering? Not so, says Macdonald, surely a rare author not to bemoan changing his work for the films. Citing the opportunities for the camera, he says: "I think it's a refreshing idea to put a private-eye story in Louisiana for a change."

Crime on television this fall brings some familiar names to the small screen, including Matt Helm, The Invisible Man and, of course, Ellery Queen. Less familiar are *The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes,* those Victorian and Edwardian detectives who never attained the reknown of the titular character (who is not represented in the series) but here once again are allowed to unfurl their deductions in lush period splendor. Carnacki, the ghost-finder (winningly, eccentrically played by Donald Pleasance), tracks a phantom horse; blind Max Carrados (Robert Stephens) foils a kidnaping, Lady Molly of Scotland Yard (Elvi Hale) investigates murder in a tearoom.

Although some of the classic cases are regrettably altered in their dramatizations (the Old Man in the Corner, for instance, never appears as a character in the program based on one of his cases), the atmosphere and production are impeccable. As of this writing,

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only 13 of the 26 programs have been sold to American television (for PBS showing). We can only hope the remainder are also soon acquired and with the three new American series will help raise the standards of the television mystery.

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Friends, charge your glasses. Whether to round out the old year or usher in the new, December has proved more than fortunate. Though there are no straight detective stories, I can salute four brilliant mystery thrillers of which the first and the third, containing sound detection as well as thrill, may fairly be called memorable.

These stories alternate American with British. The protagonist of our first three books, though he is or has been a government secret agent, must deal with some private plot or crisis privately organized for sinister ends. In our fourth novel the protagonist—no secret agent, but news-magazine photographer—is the only one called on to play secret agent in a far-reaching spy design.

CIA Agent Harry Calder, posing as part of a Tokyo business firm in Robert L. Duncan's *Dragons at the Gate* (Morrow, $7.95), has no rest at all. While saving a threatened economic conference, he must learn what has happened to the disappearing Japanese gold and defeat the enemy who would ruin him with a frame.

Complicated by inter-office treachery and at least two women, from his former Japanese sweetheart to beautiful, greedy, amoral Hannah Mulridge, it's a near-deadly ordeal for Calder. But he's a good sort; he'll survive. Vivid characters, fast action, and much ingenuity of plot lend added grip to this powerful Oriental melodrama with all the evidence in sight.

The title of *The Deadly Gold,* by John Rossiter (Walker, $5.95), refers to a religious image of the Virgin, jewel-crowned, made of gold once filched by conquest, whose gory saga has not yet ended even at its mountain monastery in Spain.

Murderous Costain Quayle, British crime artist, is related to a political swell who would be embarrassed if their kinship were known. Therefore Britain's most daring secret agent, urbane Roger Tallis, must intervene when Quayle schemes to heist the golden relic from its shrine.

Drawn into the robbery by mistake, Tallis pilots a helicopter for Quayle and his savage associates, while at one side waits Carol Asher, that fetching female of sta-

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tus undefined. Blood flows, bullets fly, with the Guardia Civil in pursuit and death claiming one hood after another until the final shoot-out in the cave.

Can he trust Carol even then? Trust her or not, Tallis returns the golden image almost intact, for the only possible ending to a first-rate thriller which has kept every promise it made.

From the opening pages of Clive Cussler's *Iceberg* (Dodd, Mead, $7.95), when an American Coast Guard plane sights an entire ship frozen inside an immense iceberg in the North Atlantic, it's all uncertainty or doubt. What happened to that mystery ship later? Who erased the dye marker from the ice? What's the secret undersea device of such incalculable value?

In not-so-chilly Iceland, dominated by local millionaire Oskar Rondheim and beautiful blonde millionairess Kirstie Fyrie, Major Dirk Pitt shoulders past obstacles through a not-so-secret mission in which nothing is what it seems, nothing can be taken for granted, and everything explodes into mayhem or murder.

Is the KGB our villain? Or is it somebody closer to home? Major Dirk Pitt, technically Air Force though agent for all, may seem rather too invulnerable; but, despite his buoyant emergence from trials which would kill Superman, he'll soon win your sympathy and support.

Whoever may be our principal *malefactor, the reader is given* fair opportunity to deduce. *Enfin,* there's one last surprise before the end of this superb intrigue, which almost demands attention from every connoisseur.

Temporarily enrolled in Britain's cloak-and-dagger brigade, Michael Mannis, news photographer of *The White Lie Assignment,* by Peter Driscoll (Lippincott, $7.50), has been told he need use no deceit except a few harmless misrepresentations when he slips into Communist-held Albania on a photographic mission.

That in itself is lie anything but white. Apparently Mannis has no chance as Chinese Communists battle Moscow's own in some cut-throat jugglery during which perilous evidence flies from hand to hand like an atomic grenade.

Never mind these reds; a veteran British agent springs the biggest surprise. Despite all odds, after his ultimate fight in the villains' speedboat our engaging non-agent, Mannis himself, can return to his red-haired girl and triumphantly end an A-1 adventure in espionage.

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"Q"

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REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

ELLERY QUEEN'S MURDERCADE, ed. by Ellery Queen. Random House, $8.95

The 29th annual collection from the magazine acknowledged to be Number One in the mystery field. And for this latest, Ellery Queen has coined a new word: murdercade—a parade of people in murders. Here you will find, as Ellery Queen writes in the introduction, the excitement of escapade, the danger of ambuscade, the explosiveness of hand grenade... but beware the false faces of masquerade."

"No. 29 and hard to beat."—*Kirkus Reviews.*

"These yearly offshoots from *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* always have style. This time it includes Isaac Asimov, Ruth Rendell, Michael Innes, Anthony Gilbert, Patricia Highsmith, Ngaio Marsh, Agatha Christie, and Celia Fremlin, among some equally excellent others."—*Publishers' Weekly.*

EVERY CRIME IN THE BOOK. An Anthology of Mystery Stories by the Mystery Writers of America. G. P. Putnam's Sons, $7.95
Edited and with a foreword by Robert L. Fish.

Murder, mayhem, intrigue! The Mystery Writers of America are guilty of "every crime in the book" in an anthology of 25 great stories by such top writers as Ellery Queen, Margaret Millar, Robert Bloch, Stanley Ellin, Bill Pronzini, and Joe Gores. From the classic locked-room puzzle to a vintage horror story to futuristic crime in tomorrow's world, connoisseurs of mystery and suspense will find these entertaining, finely crafted selections super reading!

"The year's best is just getting better and better."—*Kirkus Reviews* (Starred).

THE PIED PIPER OF HELFENSTEIN, by Edward V. McCarthy, Jr. Doubleday & Co., Inc., $5.95

An extraordinary will, an old painting and a curious legend lead attorney John Stapleton on a search for the Pied Piper of Helfenstein, a World War II Scarlet Pimpernel who supposedly rescued hundreds of children from the horrors of Nazi concentration camps. He was always dressed in the uniform of an SS officer, and it is said that he spirited anywhere from three hundred to five thousand children to safety in Switzerland. Stapleton is led on a search that takes him through the madness of Nazi Germany, the demimonde of Depression-era hustlers, and the tenements of New York. Piece by piece he fleshes out the man behind the legend.

HONEYMOON WITH DEATH: A Julian Quist Mystery Novel, by *Hugh Pentecost.* *Dodd, Mead,* $5.95

Hugh Pentecost's newest Julian Quist novel is set at a glamorous resort, Honeymoon Haven, where a mysterious murder has taken place. Quist, who in the words of the *New York Times Book Review* columnist Newgate Callendar is "the mod, wealthy, brilliant, handsome public relations man who always comes up with the right answer," has been asked by Honeymoon Haven's owner, a former movie star who had been America's sex symbol during the '40s, to advise her on promoting the resort. Suddenly he finds himself in the center of a blackmail scheme involving millions of dollars and a power struggle between two giant corporations. Pentecost at his spine-chilling best.

A Red Badge Novel of Suspense.

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A CHILD'S GARDEN OF DEATH. A Poignant Novel of Suspense by Richard Forrest. Bobbs-Merrill, $7.95

Outside of a small town in Connecticut, a 30-year-old grave is uncovered. In it are the remains of a man, his wife and eight-year-old daughter. The police chief calls on his Korean war buddy, Lyon Wentworth, because Lyon has an "unusual kind of mind." Lyon, a writer of juveniles, a balloonist, and husband of a state senator helps fine-sift the clues, and slowly pieces together the vivid story of what happened. Finally justice is done—and Lyon Wentworth is at peace with himself. (His own daughter had been killed when she was eight.) This is the first of a very unusual series, with this unusual hero.

THE BUTTERFLY FLOOD, by John Wyllie. Doubleday & Co., Inc., $5.95

The decapitated corpse of a white man is found on a sacred rock in West Africa and leads the intuitive Dr. Quarshie and his wife on their second adventure. Many questions enter the doctor's mind concerning this occurrence—was the killing and execution one event? Why hadn't anyone reported the man missing? Was the fact that the body was found on a sacred rock symbolic? Dr. Quarshie and his wife proceed from his assumption that the dead man had been en route to some destination—where, what stopped him and why are questions which will not be easy to answer.

This is a novel of scrupulous psychological realism, set against the background of modern Africa, where the influence of the West is juxtaposed with its tribal past.

Additional reviews on pages 21 and 158.

TITLE NO.	AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	DISCOUNTED PRICE
75841	Christie, Agatha	CURTAIN	Dodd, Mead	$7.95	$6.35
57745	Courtine, Robert	MADAME MAIGRET'S RECIPES	Harcourt	8.95	6.95
75688	Cussler, Clive	ICEBERG	Dodd, Mead	7.95	6.35
75034	Davies, L. P.	ASSIGNMENT ABACUS	Doubleday	5.95	4.75
71707	Driscoll, Peter	THE WHITE LIE ASSIGNMENT	Lippincott	7.50	5.95
57595	Duncan, Robert L.	DRAGONS AT THE GATE	Morrow	7.95	6.35
74402	ed. Ellery Queen	ELLERY QUEEN'S MURDERCADE	Random House	8.95	6.95
55085	ed. Robert L. Fish	EVERY CRIME IN THE BOOK	Putnam	7.95	6.35
56831	Forrest, Richard	A CHILD'S GARDEN OF DEATH	Bobbs-Merrill	7.95	6.35
56880	Hall, F. H.	IN THE LAMB WHITE DAYS	Bobbs-Merrill	6.95	5.50
72517	Hitchman, Janet	SUCH A STRANGE LADY	Harper	8.95	6.95
56918	McCarthy, E. V. Jr.	THE PIED PIPER OF HELFENSTEIN	Doubleday	5.95	4.75
78390	Meyer, Nicholas	THE SEVEN-PER-CENT SOLUTION	Dutton	6.95	5.50
75785	Pentecost, Hugh	HONEYMOON WITH DEATH	Dodd, Mead	5.95	4.75
56943	Rossiter, John	THE DEADLY GOLD	Walker	5.95	4.75
74825	Roueché, Berton	THE LAST ENEMY	Harper	6.95	5.50
84358	Stout, Rex	THE NERO WOLFE COOK BOOK	Viking	7.95	6.35
57014	Wyllie, John	THE BUTTERFLY FLOOD	Doubleday	5.95	4.75

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a NEW short story by

NANCY C. SWOBODA

It is hard enough to plan a perfect crime when you have the full use of all your senses, but think how difficult it must be for a blind person to commit a foolproof murder . . .

A DAY FOR DYING

by NANCY C. SWOBODA

Vic Risden moved slowly but confidently through the living room to the kitchen. Aside from the oblique focus of his blind eyes his general posture was almost normal. He knew himself to be tall, dark, and in middle age, still ruggedly attractive. If it hadn't been for the car accident he'd be rubbing knees with some cute little trick under the table at an intimate bar instead of going for a beer in the refrigerator.

He could hear Helen washing clothes in the basement. Even though she had an automatic washer and dryer she was forever rinsing out little frilly things in the big double sink. After the first few years that's what their marriage had become, a washout. Instead of mellowing she had become precise, unbending, and eventually he felt no qualms about trading on his attractiveness to women.

He reached the refrigerator, opened the door, and put out his hand to grasp a can of beer. Instead, his fingers stubbed against a heavy crockery bowl. After some cursing to himself he slammed the door of the refrigerator and made his way to the basement door.

"Dammit, Helen, where'd you hide my beer this time?" he shouted down at her.

He heard her footsteps and then a breathless sigh as she neared the top of the basement stairs.

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"I didn't hide your beer. I simply forgot and put a crock of soup in front of it." Her voice was high and thready.

"You know how I depend on everything being in the same place. Is that asking too much?"

"No. But remember that both of us have to get used to your being blind. I have to learn right along with you, you know." She sounded breathless.

"All right. Don't get one of your spells over a can of beer. Calm down. It's not that important." He turned, felt for a bearing, then headed back to the living room.

"Don't you want your beer?" Helen called after him.

"No. I'm out of the mood," he threw back over his shoulder.

He really did want a beer but he didn't want to give Helen the opportunity to work herself into one of her fainting spells. She had high blood pressure but her swoons didn't become frequent until after he had started playing around with other women. At first her spells were little bids for attention, sympathy. When she found that they elicited only displeasure the spells diminished. But the fact remained she did get them and she made him well aware that he was the probable cause.

"Before I go back to the basement can I get you anything?" She had followed him into the living room and her voice was now pleasant, bordering on solicitous.

"No. I'm going to listen to the radio for a while."

His mind wandered back to the car accident. Nita Trowbridge had been with him. He hadn't bothered with any excuses. He had simply told Helen that he wouldn't be home until late, and then he had driven Nita to a cozy little country inn for dinner. It was on the way back that the truck hit them. Nita had escaped with a broken arm and scratches. The trucking company's insurance combined with Vic's now assured him of a comfortable lifelong income.

For the first few months after the accident Vic was grateful that Helen was there to take care of him. Most of the time he wallowed in a deep depression and the awful blank darkness made self-pity a desirable companion. As long as she saw to his comfort he was content to vegetate. But soon he considered himself proficient in doing little activities around the house.

Other than the basement stairs he had none to negotiate. It being a ranch house made it easier to memorize the furniture and room locations. Perhaps with a cane and some professional help, maybe

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even a guide dog, he could soon break free of the confinement that Helen was enjoying.

He broached the subject at dinner. "I think I'm getting around well enough to begin some professional training."

He could hear her fork clank as she set it deliberately on her plate before replying.

"Somehow I can't picture you stabbing about with a white cane," she said.

"What would you have me do? Spend the rest of my life sitting in a chair listening to the radio?"

"Of course not. If you want to get out and around I'll go with you," she said dutifully.

He could feel the smothering atmosphere wind tighter. Defensively he said, "There *will* be times, you realize, when I'd prefer to be alone."

She gave a knowing little laugh. "Oh, my poor dear, I don't think that need will present itself—not now."

He heard her chair slide back and the sound of things being cleared from the table. Helen was again having the last word by using her maddening tactic of merely walking away from him. Angrily he threw down his napkin and it gave him a small amount of pleasure to hear his coffee cup clatter from its saucer onto the table. He hoped it was making a large stain on the cloth.

As he sat in his chair he could hear Helen's words again: "I don't think that need will present itself—not now." He knew she was implying that no other woman would find him attractive in his blindness. Idly he pictured himself the tragic, romantic figure, still dashing and perhaps even more appealing minus his sight. With practise he could be almost as active as before, residing in a posh apartment, accompanied by his faithful guide dog, and attended by a suave valet. He didn't need—he didn't want Helen at all.

His declaration of independence proved to be a painful mistake. In the days that followed things seemed always to be getting in his way or disappearing from their usual locations. He barked both shins on furniture that was just a shade out of position, found himself brushing his teeth with hair cream, and pouring bourbon instead of Scotch. Needless to say, it all had a disorienting effect.

Helen, of course, pleaded total innocence. Cautiously he made his way around, tested, tasted, and smelled before he committed

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himself so that he could foil Helen. He knew there were times when she must be watching him fumble his way through a simple function and he imagined not a martyr expression on her damn Dresden face. Oh, no. She'd be working her rosebud mouth into a satisfied sneer.

Divorce. That's it, he finally thought. Continue the helpless role she's been pushing on you, continue to be a burden, and then offer her her freedom and a nice little settlement. After all his playing around, and with the present sterility of their marriage and his blindness, she'd be a fool not to cut loose from him. It was worth a try.

At least once a day, when Helen was either in the basement with her incessant washing or in the middle of some other project, he would bleat out a call for help in finding a specific item or in fixing something to eat. He kept her so busy waiting on him that she was becoming noticeably short-tempered, short of breath, and he could hear her snoring at night.

When he felt he had pushed her to the small end of her endurance he tried his soft sell.

"I'm sorry, Helen. Because of me you've been running your legs off, and I don't seem to be getting any better at helping myself."

"It does seem that I've had to do for you more than usual." Her reply was candid.

"I—I've been thinking. We both know I'll never see again. I'll be a permanent burden to you."

"We've already discussed that."

"But it's not fair to you, Helen. Your health has to be considered, too."

"All right, Vic. What are you driving at?"

"I'm prepared to give you your freedom—a divorce."

Her reply was an almost hysterical laugh.

"What's so funny, Helen?"

"You. You must think I'm the blind one. I have what I want. I wouldn't change anything for the world."

"But what is there left for you? Things aren't the same as they once were. We both know that."

"Perhaps not, but I don't have to fight any more. I've found a security now that I didn't have before." She was beginning to breathe in gasps.

"I can see to it that you'll have all that, Helen—security, I mean. A good settlement should give you what you want."

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"You fool! If I chose to press matters, a lawyer could strip you of nearly everything, blind or not. Be careful, Vic. Be glad I'm charitable." She almost whispered the last few words.

This time he walked away from her. He made his way to the bedroom and closed the door behind him. Even then he couldn't rid himself of the suffocating sensation. He had felt it many times in the past, but now it seemed to clutch him with an iron hand that squeezed him closer to Helen and squeezed out all thoughts of girls, guide dogs, and valets.

At dinner she acted as if their previous discussion had never taken place. Her cloying possessiveness reached out and wrapped tentacles around him, so tightly he could hardly swallow his food. As long as he was subsurvient, content to rely on her, she would be placid, happy. Even the thought of independence would trip him up—literally. Helen would see to that.

Sightless, his thoughts formed images against black velvet. In his mind he watched Helen start down the basement stairs and fall head over heels to the bottom in a lifeless heap. He saw her face turn purple as she gasped for breath and failed to survive one of her spells. He twitched involuntarily as he watched her electrocute herself by tipping the bathroom heater into her tub of water.

It was the only possible solution. Kill or be killed. But how, being blind, could he possibly contrive an accidental death? By the time he blundered around trying to carry out any of his imagined catastrophes, Helen would be well aware of what he was attempting. But perhaps not. If he were to practise, rehearse each move carefully, he could do it.

Wait. How perfect! All the elements he needed were right there. Everyone knew she had those spells and how fastidious she was. For her to be bending over a deep sink full of wash water, then have a spell and slump forward into the sink and drown was not at all unlikely. Many people have drowned in bathtubs . . .

He sat in his chair eagerly awaiting his first attempt at the basement. Her beauty-parlor appointment would take at least two hours. When she came in to announce her departure he concentrated on keeping his face in what he imagined to be a neutral expression. One trace of pleasure or independence would mean a delay in his plan. Finally she was gone.

He made his way cautiously to the basement door. Once he began to descend, his pace automatically gauged the space between the steps until he came to the bottom with a jolt. Why, it was

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easy, he thought. He had come down without a hitch, but he reminded himself to count the steps so that he wouldn't make such an abrupt landing next time. He turned to the right and counted six steps before he bumped into the double sink.

Vic made five more practise runs. There were twelve steps down and exactly six paces to the sink. He was actually able to negotiate the entire distance with little noise. Just one or two days of rehearsal and he felt he would be ready. Soon he'd be free, able to live in that posh apartment, able to do as he wished, free of a wife who didn't want him but wouldn't let him go.

He felt so good that when Helen returned from the hairdresser's he couldn't resist a jibe. "That beauty routine of yours is kind of a waste, isn't it? At least for me it is."

She tossed the car keys on the table. "I still have my pride, but that's hard for you to understand, I'm sure."

He heard her stalk off to the bedroom. For a little person she could walk heavily when she wanted to convey her anger. Well, let her vent her wrath all she wanted. It wouldn't bother him, now that he had found his escape . . .

On Wednesday the following week he sat waiting in the kitchen while she finished the dishes. He nursed his cup of coffee and drummed his fingers on the table. She had told him she was going to the basement after breakfast to do some things. He was ready. He had satisfied himself with another rigorous practise session while she was at the grocery store and now, dressed in slacks, sneakers, and a short-sleeved shirt, he awaited his freedom.

As always she had to remind him that he was dependent on her ministrations. But not for much longer, he thought. He could hear her running the water in the tub and when it shut off he listened. Yes. She was swishing and splashing in her usual fashion. It was now or never, he told himself, as he took a deep breath and started down the stairs.

Twelve steps and he was at the bottom. Helen was still making her washing noises. Six paces and his body pressed against her back. He could feel her stiffen with surprise. Locked in a deadly embrace, the two of them bent slowly forward and down.

He heard her bubbling, gasping for breath, and then silence. He held her under a little longer to be sure, then let go slowly. She remained doubled over the sink.

He was trembling as he made his way back up to the kitchen. Quickly he dried his bare arms on paper toweling and felt himself

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all over to make sure there were no other signs of water. Actually it had been very neatly done. There had been no thrashing about and he had felt the contact of the warm water only on his forearms. Good. Now to call the neighbor, Mrs. Cooley. He dialed the operator and gave her the number.

"Mrs. Cooley? This is Vic Risden. Helen said to call you if I ever needed help."

"Of course. What is it?" said a pleasant older woman's voice.

"It's Helen. She went down to do some washing and I've called to her, but she doesn't answer. You know she has those little spells and well, could you—"

"I'll be right over," she interrupted quickly and hung up.

Mrs. Cooley, despite her obvious distress over what she found in the basement, had the presence of mind to call the police and then excuse herself to go home and take a heart pill. She promised to come right back. But Inspector Stern, who happened to be in a cruiser in the vicinity, took the call and reached the Risden house before Mrs. Cooley's return.

The Inspector and his man were down and back upstairs in short order. He queried Vic in a cool impersonal voice.

"Tell me about it, Mr. Risden."

He went through it very carefully, telling about Helen's spells and how he had called Mrs. Cooley to come and see what was the matter, because being newly blind he couldn't negotiate the stairs.

"And you say Mrs. Risden went down to do some washing?"

"Yes. When she didn't answer me I knew something was wrong. Helen always listened for me—because of my eyes." He made his voice quaver.

"And at no time did you attempt to go to the basement?"

"Of course not. I haven't tackled those stairs since my accident. No reason to. I'm not that sure of myself."

"Very well, Mr. Risden. Please listen carefully while I read you your rights."

"My *rights*? But that means—what are you saying?"

"That unfortunately for a blind man your wife picked the wrong day to do her dyeing."

"How dare you say such a thing about my wife's death!"

"I'll explain. Your wife was dyeing curtains today—dyeing, d-y-e-i-n-g—and the same color of dye is still on your arms, almost up to your elbows. Shall we go now, Mr. Risden?"

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a *NEW* short-short by

RICHARD LAYMON

"Want to see your wife again? If I give the signal, my buddy will kill her . . ."

OUT OF THE WOODS

by RICHARD LAYMON

A sound like footsteps outside the tent shocked me out of half-sleep. Another camper? Not likely. We were far from the main trails and hadn't seen a backpacker in three days.

Maybe it was no one at all. Maybe a twig or pine cone had dropped from a nearby tree. Or maybe the smell of food had drawn an animal to our camp. A big animal.

I heard it again—a dry crushing sound.

My body didn't want to move, but I forced it to roll over and see if Sadie was awake.

She was gone.

I looked down the length of my mummy bag. The unzipped screen swayed inward. A cool damp-smelling breeze touched my face, and I remembered her leaving the tent. How long ago? No way to tell. Maybe I had dozed for an hour, maybe for a minute. At any rate, it was high time for her to come in so we could close up the flaps.

"Hey, Sadie, why don't you get in here?"

I heard only the stream several yards from our campsite. It made a racket like a gale blowing through a forest.

"Sadie?" I called.

Nothing.

"Saay-deee!"

She must have wandered down the stream, out of earshot. Okay. It was a fine night, cold but clear, with a moon so round and white you could sit up for hours enjoying it. That's what we'd

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done, in fact, before turning in. I couldn't blame her for taking her time out there.

"Enjoy yourself," I muttered, and shut my eyes. My feet were a bit cold. I rubbed them together through my sweatsocks, curled up, and adjusted the roll of jeans beneath my head. I was just beginning to get comfortable when somebody close to the tent coughed.

It wasn't Sadie.

"Who's out there?" I called.

"Only me," said a man's low voice, and the tent began to shake violently. "Come outa there!"

"What do you want?"

"Make it quick."

"Stop shaking the tent." I took my knife from its sheath on the belt of my jeans.

The tent stopped shaking. "I've got a shotgun," the man said. "Come outa there before I count five or I'll blast apart the tent with you in it. One."

I scrambled out of my sleeping bag.

"Two."

"Hey, can't you wait till I get dressed?"

"Three. Come out with your hands empty, four."

I stuck the knife down the side of my sweatsock, handle first to keep it from falling out, and crawled through the flaps.

"Five, you just made it."

I stood up, feeling twigs and pine cones under my feet, and looked into the grinning, bearded face of a man who bore a disturbing resemblance to Rasputin. He had no shotgun. Only my hand-ax. I scanned the near bank of the stream behind him. No sign of Sadie.

"Where's the shotgun?" I asked. Then I clamped my mouth shut to keep my teeth quiet.

The man gave a dry vicious laugh. "Take that knife outa your sock."

I looked down. I was wearing only shorts and socks, and the moonlight made the knife blade shine silvery against my calf.

"Take it out slowly," he warned.

"No."

"Want to see your wife again? If I give the signal, my buddy will kill her. Slit her open like a wet sack."

"You've got Sadie?"

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"Back in the trees. Now, the knife."

"Not a chance." I pressed my knees together to keep them from banging against each other. "You'll kill us both anyway."

"Naw. All we want's your food and gear. See, we gotta do some camping. You understand, old man." He grinned as if a glimpse of his big crooked teeth would help me understand better. It did.

"What did you do?" I asked, trying to stall for time. "Rob a bank?"

"That, too. Now are you gonna get rid of that knife or do I signal Jake to start cutting?"

"Better signal Jake," I said, and grabbed my knife.

"You sure?"

"I'm sure. Just one favor, though. Do you mind if I tell my wife goodbye?"

He grinned again. "Go on."

"Thanks," I said. Then I yelled, "Goodbye, Sadie! Sadie? Goodbye, old girl!"

"Enough." He came forward, holding the ax high, shaking it gently as if testing the weight of its head. All the time he grinned.

My knife flew end over end, glinting moonlight, and struck him square in the chest. Hilt first.

He kept coming. Finally I backed into a tree. Its bark felt damp and cold and rough against my skin.

"There's no Jake," I said to distract him.

"So what?" he answered.

I raised my hands to block the ax and wondered if it would hurt for long.

Then a chilling, deep-throated howl shook the night. A mastiff splashed through the stream. Huge, brutish, black as death. The man had no time to turn. He only had time to scream before Sadie, snarling, took him down and began to rip his throat.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Petrella novelet by

MICHAEL GILBERT

first publication in the United States

In which Detective Sergeant Petrella is offered a most serious narcotics investigation—a case involving "an international crowd who are calculating their profits in the millions," and even more frightening, "who must be responsible, directly or indirectly, for hundreds of deaths a year," and to whom—a fact that Petrella must weigh carefully—"a single life is not of great importance" . . . a superlative example of Michael Gilbert's police procedurals . . .

THE SARK LANE MISSION

by MICHAEL GILBERT

"You're wanted down at Central," said Gwilliam. "They want to have a little chat with you about your pension."

"My pension?" said Detective Sergeant Petrella. Being nearer 20 than 30, pensions were not a thing which entered much into his thoughts. "You're sure it's not my holiday? I've been promised a holiday for eighteen months."

"Last time I saw the pensions officer," said Gwilliam, "he said to me, 'Sergeant Gwilliam, it's a dangerous job you're doing.' It was the time I was after that Catford dog-track shower and I said, 'You're right, there, my boy.' 'Do you realize, Sergeant,' he said to me, 'that every year for the past ten years one hundred and ninety policemen have left the force with collapsed arches? And this year we may pass the two hundred mark. We shall have to raise your insurance contributions.' "

Petrella went most of the way down to Westminster by bus. It was a beautiful morning, with spring breaking through all round. Having some time in hand he got off the bus at Piccadilly, walked

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down St. James's, and cut across the corner of the park.

It was a spring which was overdue. They had had a dismal winter. In the three years he had been in Q Division, up at Highside, he could not remember anything like it. The devil seemed to have got among the pleasant people of North London.

First, an outbreak of really nasty hooliganism, led, as he suspected, by two boys of good family; but he hadn't been able to pin it on them. Then the silly business of the schoolgirl shoplifting gang. Then the far-from-silly, the dangerous and tragic matter of Cora Gwynne.

Gwynne was the oldest by several years of the Highside detectives. He was a quiet but well-liked man, and he had one daughter, Cora, who was 17. Six months before, Cora had gone. She had not disappeared; she had departed, leaving a note behind her saying that she wanted to live her own life. "Whatever that means," Gwynne had said to Haxtell.

"Let her run," Haxtell had replied. "She'll come back."

He was right. She came back at the end of the fifth month, in time to die. She was full of cocaine, and pregnant.

Petrella shook his head angrily as he thought about it. He stopped to look at the crocuses which were thick in the grass. A starved-looking sparrow was trying to bolt a piece of bread almost as large as itself. A pigeon sailed smoothly down and removed it.

Petrella walked on, up the steps into King Charles Street, across Whitehall, and under the arch into New Scotland Yard. He was directed to the office that dealt with pensions, allotted a wooden chair, and told to wait. At eleven o'clock a messenger brought in a filing tray with six cups of tea on it, and disappeared through a swing door in the partition. Since the tray was empty when he returned, Petrella deduced that there must be at least six people devoting attention to the pensions of the Metropolitan Police and he hoped that one of them would soon find time to devote some attention to him.

He became aware that the messenger had halted opposite him.

"You Sergeant Pirelli?" he said.

"That's right," said Petrella. He had long ago given up correcting people about his name.

"C.I.D., Q Division?"

"Ten out of ten."

"Whassat?"

"I said you're quite right."

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"I'll tell 'em you're here," said the messenger.

Five minutes later a cheerful-looking girl arrived and said, "Sergeant Petrella? Would you come with me, please?"

His opinion of the Pensions Section became a good deal more favorable. Any department that employed a girl with legs like that must have some good in it.

So engrossed was he in this speculation that it did not, at first, occur to him to ask where they were going. When they reached and pushed through a certain swing door on the first floor, he stopped her.

"You've got it wrong," he said. "This is where the top brass works. If we don't look out we shall be busting in on the Assistant Commissioner."

"That's right," said the girl. She knocked on one of the doors on the south side of the corridor, then opened it without waiting for an answer, and said, "I have Sergeant Petrella here for you."

He advanced dazedly into the room. He had been there once before, and he knew that the gray-haired man behind the desk was Assistant Commissioner Romer, of the C.I.D., a man who, unlike some of his predecessors, had not come to his office through the soft byways of the legal department, but had risen from the bottom-most rung of the ladder, making enemies at every step, until finally he had found himself at the top; and when, there being no one left to fight, he proved himself a departmental head of exceptional ability.

In a chair beside the window he noted Superintendent Costorphine, who specialized in all matters connected with narcotics. He had worked for him on two previous occasions and had admired him, although he could not love him.

Romer said in a very friendly voice, "Sit down, will you, Sergeant. This is going to take some time. You know Costorphine, don't you? I'm sorry about this cloak-and-dagger stuff, but you'll understand better when I explain what it's about, and what we're going to ask you to do. And when I say 'ask' I mean just that. Nothing at all that's said this morning is anything approaching an order. It's a suggestion. If you turn it down, no one's going to think any the worse of you. In fact, Costorphine and myself will be the only people who will even know about it."

Assuming a cheerfulness which he was far from feeling, Petrella said, "You tell me what you want me to do, sir, then I can tell you if I want to run away."

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Romer nodded at Costorphine, who said in his schoolmasterly voice, "Almost a year ago we noted a new source of entry of cocaine into this country. Small packets of it were taken from distributors *inside* the country. It was never found in large quantities, and we never found how it got in.

"Analysis showed it to be Egyptian in origin. It also showed quite appreciable deposits of copper. It is obviously not there as the result of any part of the process of manufacture, and it is reasonable to suppose that it came there during some stage in shipment or entry.

"Once the source had been identified, we analyzed every sample we laid hands on, and it became clear"—Costorphine paused fractionally, not for effect; he was a man who had no use for effects, but because he wished to get certain figures clear in his own head—"that rather over half of the total intake of illicit cocaine coming into this country was coming under this head. And that the supply was increasing."

"And along with it," said Romer, "were increasing, at a rate of geometrical progression, most of the unpleasant elements of criminal activity with which we have to deal. Particularly among juveniles. I've had some figures from America which made my hair stand on end. We're not quite as bad yet, but we're learning."

Petrella could have said, "There's no need to tell me. I knew Cora Gwynne when she was a nice friendly schoolgirl of fourteen, and I saw her just before she died." But he kept quiet.

Romer went on, "I suppose if youth thinks it may be blown to smithereens inside five or ten years by some impersonal force pressing a button, it's predisposed to experiment. I don't know. Anyway, you'll understand why we thought it worth bringing down a busy Detective Sergeant from Q Division.

"Now, I'm going to give you some facts. We'll start, as our investigators started about nine months ago, with a gentleman named Batson. Mr. Batson is on the board of the Consort Line, a company which owns and runs three small cargo steamers: the *Albert Consort*, the *William Consort*, and the *Edward Consort*–steamers which run between various Mediterranean ports, Bordeaux, and London."

When Romer said, "Bordeaux," Petrella looked up at Costorphine, who nodded.

"Bordeaux, but not the racket you're thinking of," he said. "We've checked that."

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"Batson," went on Romer, "is not only on the board of the Consort Line. It has been suggested that he *is* the board. But one thing about him is quite certain. Whatever his connection with this matter he, personally, takes no active part. He neither carries the stuff nor has any direct contact with the distributors. But I think that, at the end of the day, the profit goes to him.

"That being so, we looked carefully at his friends, and the one who caught our eye was Captain Cree. Ex-captain now, since he has retired from the services of the Consort Line, he lives in considerable affluence in a house at Greenwich. He maintains a financial interest in the *Consort*s through his friend, Mr. Batson, and acts as chandler and shore agent for them—finds them crews and cargoes, and buys their stores.

"All of which might add up, in cash, to a nice house at Greenwich, but wouldn't really account for"—Romer ticked them off on his fingers—"two personal motor cars, with a chauffeur bodyguard to look after the same, a diesel-engined tender called *Clarissa* based on Wapping, with a whole-time crew of three and, in addition to all these, a large number of charitable and philanthropic enterprises, chiefly among seamen and boys in the dockside area."

"He sounds perfectly terrible," said Petrella.

"Such a statement, made outside these four walls," said Romer, "would involve you in very heavy damages for defamation. Captain Cree is a respectable, and a respected, citizen. One of his fondest interests is the Sark Lane Mission."

"The Sark Lane—"

"The name is familiar to you? It should be. The Mission was one of the first in Dockland, and it was founded by your old school."

"Of course. I remember now. We used to have a voluntary subscription of five shillings taken off us on the first day of every term. I don't think anyone took any further interest in it."

"I should imagine that one of the troubles of the Sark Lane Mission is that people have not taken enough interest in it. The Missioner for the last twenty-five years has been a Mr. Jacobson. A very good man in his way and, in his early years, energetic and successful. He retired last month, at the age of seventy-five.

"I should imagine that for the last ten years his appearances at the Mission have been perfunctory. The place has really been kept going by an old ex-naval man named Batchelor—and by the regular munificence of Captain Cree."

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"I see," said Petrella. But he felt that there must be something more to it than that.

"The appointment of the Missioner lies with the School Governors, but they act on the recommendation of the Bishop of London. Sometimes the post is filled by a clergyman. Sometimes not. On this occasion the recommended candidate was the Reverend Freebone."

"Philip Freebone!"

"The present incumbent of the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, Highside. You know him, I believe?"

"Very well indeed. He started up at Highside as curate, and when the incumbent died he was left in charge. I can't imagine anyone who would do the job better."

"I can," said Romer.

When he had got over the shock, Petrella did not pretend not to understand him.

"I don't think I could get away with it, sir," he said. "Not for any length of time. There'd be a hundred things I'd do wrong."

"I'm not suggesting that you should pose as a clergyman. You could go as *Mr*. Freebone. You've had some experience with youth clubs, I believe."

"For a few months before I joined the police, yes. I wasn't very successful."

"It may have been the wrong sort of club. I have a feeling you're going to be very successful in this one."

"Has Freebone been told?"

"He knows that he's got the job. He hasn't been told of the intended—er—rearrangement."

"I think you may have some difficulty there. Phil's one of the most obstinate people I know."

"I will have a word with his Bishop."

"I am afraid clergymen do not always do what their Bishops tell them these days," remarked Costorphine.

"This isn't a job on which we can afford to make a second mistake," continued Romer.

Petrella looked up.

"We got a man into the Consort Line about six months ago. It took some doing but we managed it without, as far as we know, arousing any suspicions. He was engaged as an ordinary seaman, under the name of Mills. He made voyages on all three of the ships, and gave us very full but absolutely negative reports. He

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was on his way home a fortnight ago in the *Albert Consort*, and was reported as having deserted ship at Marseilles."

"And hasn't been seen since?"

"He's been seen," said Romer. "The French police found him in the foothills behind Marseilles two days ago. What was left of him. He'd been tortured before he was killed."

"I see," said Petrella.

"I'm telling you this so that, if you go in at all, you go in with your eyes wide-open. This is an international crowd, who are calculating their profits in the millions. And who must be responsible, directly and indirectly, for hundreds of deaths a year. A single life is not of great importance."

"No," said Petrella. "I can quite see that . . ."

A fortnight later the new Missioner came to the Sark Lane Mission. This was a rambling, two-story, yellow brick building in the style associated, through the East End, with temperance and good works.

The street doors opened into a small lobby in which a notice said, in startling black letters, WIPE YOUR FEET. Someone had crossed out FEET and hopefully substituted a different part of the body. On the left of the lobby was a reception office, which was empty.

Beyond, you went straight into the main Mission room, which rose the full two-story height of the building and looked like a drill hall half-heartedly decorated for a dance. Dispirited red and white streamers hung from the iron cross-bars which spanned the roof. A poster on the far wall bore the message, in cotton wool letters, "*How will you spend Eternity?*"

At the far end of the hall three boys were throwing darts into a board. Superficially they all looked alike, with their white town faces, their thick dark hair, and their general air of having been alive a lot longer than anyone else.

When, later, Mr. Freebone got to know them, he realized that there were differences. The smallest and fattest was a lazy but competent boy called Ben. The next in height and age was Colin, a dull boy of 15, who came to life only on the football field; but for football he had a remarkable talent, a talent which was already attracting the scouts from the big clubs, and was one day to put his name in the headlines.

The oldest and tallest of the boys was called Humphrey, and he

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had a long solemn face with a nose which started straight and turned to the right at the last moment, and a mouth like a crocodile's. It was not difficult to see that he was the leader of the three.

None of them took the slightest notice of Mr. Freebone as he padded across the scarred plank flooring to watch them.

In the end he said, "You're making an awful mess of that, aren't you?" He addressed this remark to the fat boy. "If you want fifteen and end on a double it's a waste of time going for one."

The boy gaped at him. Mr. Freebone took the darts from him and threw them. First a single three, then, at the second attempt, a double six.

"There you are, Ben," said the tall boy. "I told you to go for three." He transferred his gaze to Mr. Freebone. "You want Batchy?" he said.

"Batchy?" said Mr. Freebone. "Now who, or what, would that be?"

"Batchy's Batchelor."

This was even more difficult, but in the end he made it out. "You mean the caretaker. Is his name Batchelor?"

" 'Sright. You want him, you'll find him in his room." He jerked his head toward the door at the far end of the building.

"Making himself a nice cupper," said Ben. "I once counted up how many cuppers Batchy drinks in a day. Guess how many? Seventeen."

"I'll be having a word with him soon, I expect," said Mr. Freebone. "Just for the moment I'm more interested in you. I'd better introduce myself. My name's Freebone. I'm the new Missioner."

"What's happened to old Jake?" said Ben. "I thought we hadden seen him round for a bit. He dead?"

"Now that's not nice, Ben," said the tall boy. "You don't say, 'Is he dead?' Not when you're talking to a clergyman. You say, 'Has he gone before?' "

"Clergyman or not," said Mr. Freebone, "I shouldn't use a ghastly expression like that. If I meant dead, I'd say dead. And Mr. Jacobson's not dead, anyway. He's retired. And I've got his job. Now I've told you all about me, let's hear about you. First, what are your names?"

The boys regarded him warily. The man-to-man approach was not new to them. In their brief lives they had already met plenty

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of hearty young men who had expressed a desire to lead them onward and upward to better things.

In the end it was Humphrey who spoke. "I'm Humphrey," he said. "The thin one's Colin. The fat one's Ben. You like to partner Ben we'll play 301 up, double in, double out, for a bob a side."

"Middle for diddle," said Mr. Freebone.

At the end of the third game, at which point Mr. Freebone and Ben were each richer by three shillings, Humphrey announced without rancor that he was skinned and would have to go home and get some more money. The others decided to pack it up, too.

"I hope we'll see you here this evening," said the new Missioner genially, and went in search of the resident caretaker, Batchelor, whom he found, as predicted, brewing tea in his den at the back of the hall.

He greeted the new Missioner amiably enough.

"You got lodgings?" he said. "Mr. Jacobson lived up at Greenwich and came down every day. Most days, that is."

"I'm going to do better than that," said Mr. Freebone. "I'm going to live here."

"*Live* here? *Here*?"

"Why not? I'm told there are two rooms up there."

"Well, there *are* two rooms at the back. Gotter nice view of the factory. It's a long time since anyone lived in 'em."

"Here's someone going to start," said Mr. Freebone.

"There's a piler junk in 'em."

"If you'll lend me a hand, we'll move all the junk into one of the rooms for a start. I've got a camp bed with my luggage."

Batchelor gaped at him.

"You going to sleep here *tonight*?" he said.

"I'm going to sleep here tonight and every night," said Mr. Freebone happily. "I'm going to sleep here and eat here and live here, just as long as they'll have me."

The next week was a busy one.

As soon as Batchelor saw that the new Missioner was set in his intention and immovable in his madness, he made the best of it, and turned to and lent a hand.

Mr. Freebone scrubbed and Batchelor scrubbed. Windows were opened which had not been opened in living memory. Paint arrived by the gallon.

Almost everyone fancies himself as a decorator, and as soon as

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the boys grasped that an ambitious program of interior decoration was on foot, they threw themselves into it with zeal. One purchased a pot of yellow paint, and painted, before he could be stopped, the entire outside of the porch.

Another borrowed a machine from his employer without his employer's knowledge and buffed up the planks of the main room so hard there was soon very little floor left. Another fell off the roof and broke his leg.

Thus was inaugurated Mr. Freebone's Mission at Sark Lane, a Mission which in retrospect grew into one of the oral traditions of the East End, until almost anything would be believed if it was prefaced with the words, "When ol' Freebone was at Sark Lane."

It was not, as his charges were quick to remark, that he was a particularly pious man, although the East End is one of the few places where saintliness is estimated at its true worth. Nor that he interested himself, as other excellent missioners had done, in the home life and commercial prospects of the boys in his care. It was simply that he lived in, with, and for the Mission. That, and a certain light-hearted ingenuity, allied to a curious thoroughness in the carrying out of his wilder plans.

The story will someday be told more fully of his Easter Scout Camp, a camp joined, on the first night, by three strange boys whose names had certainly not been on the original roll, and who turned out to be runaways from a Borstal institution—to whose comforts they hastily returned after experiencing, for a night and a day, the vigorous hospitality of the Sark Lane Scout Troop.

Nor would anyone who took part in it lightly forget the Great Scavenger Hunt which culminated in the simultaneous arrival at the Mission of a well-known receiver of stolen goods and the Flying Squad; or the Summer Endurance Test in the course of which a group of contestants set out to swim the Thames in full clothes and ended up in a debutante's Steamer Party. In which connection Humphrey claimed to be one of the few people who has danced, dripping wet, with a Royal personage.

Captain Cree turned up about a month after Mr. Freebone's arrival. The first intimation that he had a visitor was a hearty burst of bass laughter from the clubroom. Poking his head round the door he saw a big heavy figure, the upper half encased in a double-breasted blue jacket with brass buttons, the lower half in chalk-striped flannel trousers. The face that slewed round as he approached had been tanned by the weather to a deep russet and

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then transformed to a deeper red by some more cultivated alchemy.

"Mussen shock the parson," said Captain Cree genially. "Just showing the boys some pictures the Captain of the *William* picked up at Port Said on his last trip. You're Freebone, arnchew? I'm pleased to meet you."

He pushed out a big red hand, grasped Mr. Freebone's, and shook it heartily.

"I've heard a lot about you," said Mr. Freebone.

"Nothing to my credit, I bet," said Captain Cree, with a wink at the boys.

"I know that you're a very generous donor to the Mission," said Mr. Freebone, "and you're very welcome to come and go here as you like."

Captain Cree looked surprised. It had perhaps not occurred to him that he needed anyone's permission to come and go as he liked. He said, "Well, I call that handsome. I got a bit of stuff for you outside. The *William* picked it up for me in Alex. I've got it outside in the station wagon. You two nip out and give my monkeys a hail and we'll get it stowed."

Humphrey and Ben departed, and returned escorting two sailors, dressed in blue jerseys, with the word *Clarissa* in red stitching straggling across the front.

"Dump 'em in there, David," said Captain Cree to the young black-haired sailor. "There's a half gross of plimsolls, some running vests, a couple of footballs, and two pairs of foils. You put them down, Humphrey. I'm giving 'em to the Mission, not to you. Where'd you like 'em stowed?"

"In the back room, for the moment, I think," said Mr. Freebone. "Hey—Batchelor."

"Old Batchy still alive?" said Captain Cree. "I thought he'd have drunk himself to death long ago. How are you, Batchy?"

"Fine, Captain Cree, fine, thank you," said the old man, executing a sketchy naval salute.

"If you've finished stewing up tea for yourself, you might give a hand to get these things under hatches. You leave 'em out here a moment longer, they'll be gone. I know these boys."

When the Captain had left, Mr. Freebone had a word with Humphrey and Ben, who were now his first and second lieutenants in most club activities.

"He's given us a crate of stuff," said Humphrey.

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"Crates and crates," agreed Ben. "Footballs, jerseys, dart boards. Once he brought us a couple of what's-its—those bamboo things—you know, with steel tips. You throw 'em."

"Javelins?"

"That's right. *They* didn't last long. Old Jake took 'em away after Colin threw one at young Arthur Whaley."

"Who were the sailors?"

"The big one, he's Ron Blanden. He used to be a boy round here. The other one's David," Ben explained. "He'd be off one of the ships. Old Cree gets boys for his ships from round here, and when they've done a trip or two, maybe he gives 'em a job on the *Clarissa*. That's his own boat."

"I see," said Mr. Freebone.

"He offered to take me on, soon as I'm old enough," said Humphrey.

"Are you going to say yes?"

Humphrey's long face creased into a grin. "Not me," he said. "I'm keeping my feet dry. Besides, he's a crook."

"He's a what?"

"A crook."

"He can't just be *a* crook," said Mr. Freebone patiently. "He must be some sort of crook. What does he do?"

"I dunno," said Humphrey. "But it sticks out he's a crook, or he wouldn't have so much money. Eh, Ben?"

Ben agreed this was correct. He usually agreed with Humphrey.

Later that night Mr. Freebone and Batchelor sorted out the new gifts. The foils were really nice pairs, complete with masks and gauntlets. Mr. Freebone, who was himself something of a swordsman, took them up to his own room to examine them at leisure. The gym shoes were a good brand, with thick rubber soles. They should be very useful. Boys in these parts wore gym shoes almost all day.

"We usually wash out the vests and things," said Batchelor. "You know what foreigners are like."

Mr. Freebone approved the precaution. He said he knew what foreigners were like. Batchelor said he would wash them through next time he had a boil-up in his copper. . .

A fortnight later—in the last week of May—the officer on the monitored telephone in the basement at New Scotland Yard received a call. The call came at six o'clock in the evening, and the caller announced himself as Magnus.

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The officer said, "Count five slowly, please. Then start talking." He put out his hand and pressed down the switch. The tape recorder whirred softly as the man at the other end spoke. Later that evening Romer came down to the Yard and listened to the playback. The voice came, thin and resonant, but clear.

"Magnus here. This is my first report. I've settled into my new job. I feel little real doubt that what we suspect is correct but it's difficult to see just how the trick is pulled.

"The *Clarissa* meets all incoming *Consorts*. She takes out miscellaneous stores and usually fetches back a load of gear for the Mission. It must be the best equipped outfit in London. The customs experts give the stuff the magic-eye treatment before it's put on the *Clarissa*, and I've managed to look through most of it myself. Once it's in the Mission it's handed straight over to the boys, so it's a bit difficult to see how it could be used as a hiding place.

"Cocaine's not bulky, I know, but I gather the quantities we're looking for are quite considerable. I have a feeling this line in sports goods might be a big red herring. Something to take our eye off the real job.

"Carter, the mate of the *Clarissa*, is, I think, an ex-convict. His real name is Coster, and he's been down a number of times for larceny and aggravated assault. He carries a gun. Nothing known about the crew.

"Captain Cree"—here the tape gave a rasping scratch—"Sorry. That was me clearing my throat. As I was saying, Captain Cree's a smart operator. I should think he makes a good bit on the side out of his chandlering, but not nearly enough to account for the style he lives in. You'd imagine a man like him would keep a little woman tucked away somewhere, wouldn't you? But I never heard any whisper about the fair sex. A pity. We might get a woman to talk. That's all for now."

The weather was hot and dry that summer, and through July and August increasing supplies of illicit cocaine continued to dribble into London as water through a rotten sluice gate; and the casualty figures and the crime graphs climbed, hand in hand with the mercury in the thermometer. Superintendent Costorphine's face grew so long and so bleak that Romer took to avoiding him. For all the comfort he could give him was that things would probably get worse before they got better.

At Sark Lane, Mr. Freebone was working an eighteen-hour day.

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Added to his other preoccupations was an outbreak of skin disease. The boys could not be prevented from bathing in the filthy reaches and inlets of the Thames below Tower Bridge.

When he could spare a minute from his routine work he seemed to cultivate the company of the crew of the *Clarissa*. Carter was surly and unapproachable, but the boys were pleasant enough. Ron Blanden was a burly fair-haired young man of 20. He had ideas beyond the river and talked of leaving the *Clarissa* and joining the Merchant Navy.

David, the young black-haired one, seemed to be a natural idler, with few ideas beyond taking life easy, picking up as much money as he could, and dressing in his smartest clothes on his evenings off. He once told Mr. Freebone that he came from Scotland, but his eyes and hair suggested something more Mediterranean in origin. There was a theory that he had been in bad trouble once, in his early youth, and was now living it down.

Mr. Freebone had no difficulty, in time, in extracting the whole of the candid Ron Blanden's life story, but David, though friendly, kept his distance. All he would say—and this was a matter of record—was that he had made one trip on the *Albert Consort* that April, and had then been offered a job by Captain Cree which he had accepted.

"I don't like that David," said Batchelor one evening.

"Oh? Why?" said Mr. Freebone.

"He's a bad sort of boy," said Batchelor. "I've caught him snooping round this place once or twice lately. Fiddling round with the sports kit. I soon sent him packing."

"Hm," said Mr. Freebone. He changed the subject somewhat abruptly. "By the way, Batchelor, there's something I've been meaning to ask you. How much do we pay you?"

"Four pounds a week, and keep."

"And what does Captain Cree add to that?"

The old man stirred in his chair and blinked. "Who said he added anything?"

"I heard it."

"He pays me a pound or two, now and then. Nothing regular. I do jobs for him. Anything wrong with that?"

Magnus had fallen into the routine of reporting at the appointed hour on every second Wednesday. Toward the end of September his message was brief and contained a request. "Could you

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check up on the old boy who acts as caretaker at the Mission? He calls himself Batchelor and claims to be ex-R.N. I don't believe that's his real name and I don't believe he was ever in the Navy. Let me know through the usual channels and urgently."

Costorphine said to Romer, "Something's brewing down there. My contacts all tell me the same story. The suppliers are expecting a big autumn run."

Romer made a small helpless gesture. "And are we going to be able to stop it?" he asked.

"We can always hope," said Costorphine. "I'll find out about that man Batchelor. Jacobson will know something about him. He took him on, I believe . . ."

It was a week later that Humphrey said to Mr. Freebone, apropos of nothing that had gone before, "He's a character, that David, all right."

"What's he up to now?" said Mr. Freebone, between gasps, for he was busy blowing up a batch of new footballs.

"Wanted to cut me in on a snide racket."

Mr. Freebone stopped what he was doing, put the football down, and said, "Come on. Let's have it."

"David told me he can get hold of plenty of fivers. Good-looking jobs, he said. The *Clarissa* picks 'em up from the Dutch and German boats. He had some story they were a lot the Gestapo had printed during the war. Is that right?"

"I believe they did," said Mr. Freebone. "But they'd be the old white sort."

"That's right. That's why he wanted help passing 'em. If he turned up with a lot of 'em, it'd look suspicious. But if some of us boys helped him—"

In a rage Mr. Freebone sought out Captain Cree, who listened to him with surprising patience.

"Half those lads are crooks," he said, when the Missioner had finished. "You can't stop it."

"I'm not going to have your crew corrupting my boys," said Mr. Freebone. "And I look to you to help me stop it."

"What do you want me to do? Sack David?"

Mr. Freebone said, "I don't know that that would do a lot of good. But he's not to come near the Mission."

"I'll sort him out," said the Captain. He added, "You know, what you want's a holiday. You've had a basinful of us since you came, and you haven't had a day off in six months that I can see."

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"As a matter of fact," said Mr. Freebone, "I was thinking of taking a long weekend soon."

"You do that," said the Captain. "Tell me when you're going and I'll keep an eye on the place for you myself."

He sounded almost paternal.

"This is report number thirteen," said the tape-recorded voice of Magnus. "I hope that doesn't make it unlucky. I had a narrow escape the other day, but managed to ride the Captain off. I'm bound to say that, in my view, things are coming to a head. Just how it's going to break I don't know, but some sort of job is being planned for next weekend. Cree and Carter have been thick as thieves about it.

"Talking about thieves, I was glad to hear that my hunch about Batchelor was correct, and that he had been inside. There's something about an old lag that never washes off. It was interesting, too, that he worked at one time in a chemist's shop and had done a bit of dispensing in his youth. All he dispenses openly now are cups of vile tea. That's all for now. I hope to be on the air again in a fortnight's time with some real news for you."

Costorphine said, "That ties in with what I'd heard. A big consignment, quite soon."

"We'd better put the cover plan into operation," said Romer.

"You've got two police boats on call. Whistle them up now."

"A police launch would be a bit outgunned by the *Clarissa*. I've arranged a tie-up with the Navy. There's a launch standing by at Greenwich. We can have her up when we want her. Only we can't keep her hanging about for long—she's too conspicuous.

"I've got an uneasy feeling about this," said Romer. "They're not fools, the people we're dealing with. They wouldn't walk into anything obvious."

"Do you think Petrella—?"

"You've got to admit he's been lucky," said Romer. "It was luck that the job was going, and luck that we managed to get it for him. And he's done very well, too. But luck can't last forever. It only needs one person to recognize him—one criminal he's ever had to deal with, and he must have had hundreds through his hands in the last few years."

"He'll be all right," said Costorphine. "He's a smart lad."

"I'm superstitious," said Romer. "I don't mean about things like black cats and ladders. I mean about making bargains with for-

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tune. You remember when we were talking about this thing in here, way back in March, I said something about a single life not being important. It might be true; but I wish I hadn't said it, all the same."

Costorphine confided to his wife that night, "It's the first time I've ever seen the old man jumpy. Things must be bad. Perhaps the politicians are after him."

That Saturday night there were about two dozen boys in the clubroom of the Mission, and it says a lot for the enthusiasm engendered by Mr. Freebone that there was anyone there at all, for if ever there was a night for fireside and television this was it. The wind had started to get up with the dusk and was now blowing in great angry gusts, driving the rain in front of it.

At half-past four Captain Cree, faithful to his promise, had come up to keep an eye on things in the Missioner's absence. There had been nothing much for him to do, and he had departed for the dock where the *Clarissa* lay. Now, through the dark and the rain, he drove his big station wagon carefully back, once more, through the empty streets, and maneuvered it into the unlighted cul-de-sac beside the Mission Hall.

Carter, a big unlovely lump of a man, was sitting beside him, smoking one of an endless chain of cigarettes. This time Captain Cree did not trouble with the front entrance. There was a small side door, which gave onto a dark lobby. Out of the lobby bare wooden stairs ran up to Mr. Freebone's bedroom; on the far side a door opened through to Batchelor's sanctum.

Captain Cree stood in the dark empty lobby, his head bent. He was listening. Anyone glimpsing his good-natured red face at that particular moment might have been shocked by the expression on it.

At the end of a full minute he relaxed, went back to the street door, and signaled to Carter. The back of the station wagon was opened and the first of four big bales was lifted out and humped indoors. The bolt of the outer door was shot.

Batchelor was waiting for them. Everything about him showed that he, too, knew that some crisis was impending.

"You locked the door?" said Captain Cree. He jerked his head at the door which led into the Mission Hall.

"Of course I locked it," said Batchelor. "We don't want a crowd of boys in here. How many have you got?"

"Four," said Carter. He was the coolest of the three.

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"We'll do 'em all now," said Captain Cree. "It'll take a bit of time, but we won't get a better chance than this. When's *he* coming back?" An upward jerk of his head indicated that he was talking about the occupant of the back attic.

"Sunday midday, he said. Unless he changed his mind."

"He'd better not change it," said Carter.

He helped Batchelor to strip the thick brown-paper wrapping from one of the bales. As the covering came away the contents could be seen to be woolens, half a gross of thick woolen vests. In the second there was half a gross of long pants. Gray socks in the third. Gloves and balaclava helmets and scarves in the fourth.

Carter waddled across to the enormous gas-operated copper in the corner and lifted the lid. A fire had been lit under it earlier in the afternoon and was now glowing red; the copper was full of clean hot water.

What followed would have interested Superintendent Costorphine intensely. He would have realized how it is possible to bring cocaine into the country under the noses of the smartest customs officials, and he would have appreciated just why those samples might contain minute traces of copper.

The three men worked as a team, with the skill born of long practise. Carter dumped the woolens by handfuls in the copper. Captain Cree took them out and wrung each one carefully into a curious contraption which Batchelor had pulled from a closet. Basically this was a funnel, with a drip tray underneath. But between funnel and tray was a fine linen gauze filter. And as the moisture was wrung from each garment a grayish sediment formed on the filter.

When the filter was so full that it was in danger of becoming clogged the Captain called a halt. From a suitcase he extracted an outsize thermos bottle, and into it, with the greatest possible care, he deposited the gray sediment.

It took them over an hour to go through the first three packages. During this time the water in the copper had itself been emptied and filtered, and the copper refilled. Twice during this time a boy had rattled on the door that led into the hall and Batchelor had shouted back that he was busy.

"Tip the last lot in," said the Captain, "and be quick about it." They were all three sweating. "We don't want anyone busting in on us now."

He had never handled such a large quantity before. The third

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bottle was in use. Two were already full. He had his back to the door leading to the lobby and none of them heard or saw it open.

"What on earth are you all up to?" said Mr. Freebone.

The three men swung round in one ugly savage movement. The plastic cap of the bottle fell from Captain Cree's hand and rolled across the floor.

"What is it—washing day?"

There was a silence of paralysis as Mr. Freebone walked across the room and peered down into the bottle. "And what's this stuff?"

"What—where have you come from?" said Captain Cree hoarsely.

"I've been up in my room, writing," said Mr. Freebone. "I changed my mind and came back. Do I have to ask your permission?" He extended one finger, touched the gray powder in the bottle, and carried his finger to his lips.

Then Carter hit him. It was a savage blow, delivered from behind, with a leather-covered sap, a blow which Mr. Freebone neither saw nor heard.

They stared at him.

"You killed him?" said Batchelor.

"Don't be a damned fool," said Carter. He looked at Captain Cree. The same thought was in both their minds.

"We shall want some rope," he said. "Have you got any?"

"I don't know—"

"Go on. Get it."

It took five minutes to truss up Mr. Freebone. He was showing no signs of life, even while they manhandled him out and dumped him in the back of the station wagon.

Captain Cree seemed to have recovered his composure.

"You stay here and watch him," he said to Carter.

"Are we going to gag him?"

"I think that would be a mistake," said the Captain. "Leave too many traces." They looked at each other again. The thought was as clear now as if it had been spoken. "If he opens his mouth hit him again."

Carter nodded, and the Captain disappeared into the building. In half an hour the job was finished and he came out carrying a suitcase.

"Not a blink," said Carter.

The Captain placed the suitcase carefully in the back of the car, where it rested on the crumpled body of Mr. Freebone. Then he

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climbed into the driving seat, backed the car out, and started on the half-mile drive to Pagett's Wharf, where the *Clarissa* lay.

The wind, risen almost to gale force, was flogging the empty streets with its lash, part rain, part hail, as the big car nosed its way slowly across the cobbles of the wharf.

Captain Cree turned off the lights and climbed out, followed by Carter. Twenty yards away, in the howling wilderness of darkness, a single riding light showed where the *Clarissa* bumped at her moorings. At their feet the river slid past, cold and black.

The Captain said into Carter's ear, "We'll take the rope off him first. I put 'em on over his clothes so they won't have left much mark. If he's found, what's to show he didn't slip and knock his head going in?"

"*If* he's found," said Carter.

Back at the Mission, Batchelor was facing a mutiny.

"What've you been up to, locked in here all evening?" said Humphrey. "That was the Captain's car in the alley, wasn't it?"

"That's right," said Ben.

"And what've you done with Mr. Freebone?"

"He ent here," said Batchelor. "And you can get out of my room too, all of you."

"Where is he?"

"He went away for the weekend. He'll be back tomorrow."

As soon as he had said this, Batchelor realized his mistake.

"Don't be soft," said Humphrey. "He came back after tea. We saw him. Pop upstairs, Ben, and see if he's in his room."

"You've got no right—" said Batchelor. But they were past taking any notice of what he said.

"And what were you doing with all those clothes?" He pointed at the sodden pile in the corner. "Is this washing night or something?"

Batchelor was saved answering by the reappearance of Ben. "He's been there," he said. "The light's on. And there's a letter on the table he was finishing writing. *And* his raincoat's there."

"He wouldn't go out without a coat," said Humphrey. "Not on a night like this. He's been took."

Here Batchelor made his second mistake. He broke for the door. Several pairs of hands caught him and threw him back ungently into the chair. For the moment, after the scuffle, there was silence and stillness.

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Then Humphrey said, "I guess they were up to something. And I guess Mr. Freebone came back when he wasn't expected. And I guess the Captain and Carter and that lot have picked him up."

"So that's all you can do, guess," said Batchelor viciously. But the fear in his voice could be felt.

"All right," said Humphrey calmly. "Maybe I'm wrong. You tell us." Batchelor stared at him. Humphrey said, "Is that water hot, Ben?"

Ben dipped the tip of his finger in and took it out again quickly.

Humphrey said, "Either you talk or we hold you head-down in that."

It took six of them to get him halfway across the floor. Batchelor stopped cursing and started to scream. When his nose was six inches away from the water he talked.

"Pagett's Wharf," said Humphrey. "All right. We'll lock him up in here. If he's lying to us, we'll come back and finish him off afterwards."

"How do we get there?" said one of the boys.

"Night like this," said Humphrey, "the quickest way to get anywhere's to run."

The pack streamed out into the howling darkness.

In the big foredeck cabin of the *Clarissa*, Captain Cree was giving some final instructions to Carter when he heard the shout. Carter jumped across to the cabin door and pulled it open.

"Who's out there?" said the Captain.

"Ron's on deck," said Carter. "David's ashore somewhere."

"Who was that shouted?"

"It sounded like Ron," said Carter.

This was as far as he got. The next moment a wave of boys seemed to rise out of the darkness. Carter had time to shout before something hit him, and he went down.

The attack passed into the cabin. Captain Cree got his hand to a gun, but he had no time to fire it. Humphrey, swinging an iron bar which he had picked up on deck, broke Cree's arm with a vicious side swipe. The gun dropped from his fingers.

"Pull him in," said Humphrey. "Both of them."

Captain Cree, his right arm swinging loosely in front of him, his red face mottled with white, held himself up with his sound hand on the table.

Carter lay on the floor at his feet, and Ben kicked him, as hard

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and as thoughtlessly as you might kick a football. The boys had tasted violence and victory that night, and it had made them drunker than any strong drink.

"There's one thing can keep you alive," said Humphrey. "And that's Mr. Freebone. Where is he?"

For a count of ten there was silence. The Captain's mouth worked, but no sound came out of it.

Almost gently Humphrey said, "So you dropped him in the river. He's going to have three for company. Right?"

That was right. That was the way things were done in the land of violence and hot blood. Humphrey swung his iron bar delicately.

"You can't," said the Captain. "You can't do it. I'll tell you everything. I'll do what you like. There's ten thousand pounds' worth of cocaine in that suitcase. It's yours for the taking."

"We'll pour it in after you," said Humphrey. "It'll be useful where you're going."

"You can't do it—"

"Who's stopping us?"

"I am," said a voice from behind them. The third member of the *Clarissa*'s crew, David, stepped through the door into the cabin.

He was drenched with rain and out of breath from running; but there was something about him which held all their eyes.

"How—"

"It'll save a lot of time and trouble," said David, "if I tell you that I'm a police officer. My name, not that it matters, is Petrella. I'm a Sergeant in the plainclothes branch, and I'm taking these three men into custody."

"But," said Humphrey, "they've killed Mr. Freebone."

"They meant to kill him," said Petrella. "No doubt of it. But there've been two police launches lying off this wharf ever since dusk, and one of them picked him up. He's at Leman Street Police Station, and from what he's told me we've got more than enough to send both these men away for life. So don't let's spoil a good thing now."

There was a bump at the side of the boat as the River Police tender hitched on alongside. The first man into the cabin was Superintendent Costorphine, looking like a bedraggled crow. He pounced on the suitcase.

"Three months' supply for London," said Petrella. "It'll need a bit more drying out, but it's all there. . ."

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Later Petrella found Philip Freebone propped up on pillows in St. George's Hospital, where he had been taken under protest and deposited for the night.

"There's nothing wrong with me," he said. "I'd just as soon be back in my bed at the Mission. There's a lot to do. I shall have to find a replacement for Batchelor."

"Are you going on with that job?"

Freebone looked surprised. "Of course I am," he said. "I've enjoyed it. I knew I would. That's why I wouldn't let you do it."

"The trouble is," said Petrella, "that you've set yourself too high a standard. The boys will never have another night like tonight as long as they live. Do you realize that if I hadn't turned up, they really were going to knock Captain Cree off and put him and Carter over the side?"

"Yes, I expect they would." Freebone thought about it and added, "It's rather a compliment, really, isn't it? What are you going to do now, Patrick?"

"Take a holiday," said Detective Sergeant Petrella. "A good long holiday."

"Q"

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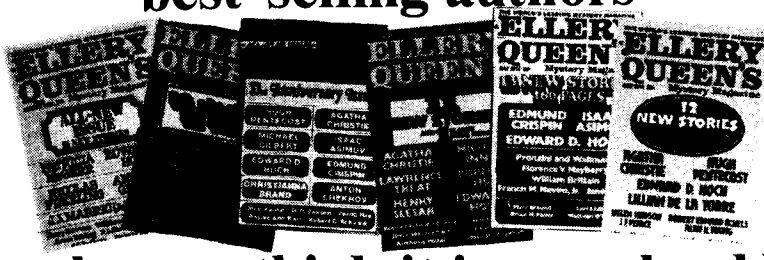

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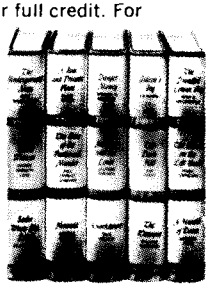

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